

SIR
WILLIAM
CALDER
BEQUEST

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/bwb_KV-028-771

*Claldy
Sammy*

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

FROM THE MANUSCRIPTS OF

THE LATE
GEORGE C. WATT, B.D.,
MINISTER OF EDINKILLIE.

FORRES:

JAMES D. MILLER, PRINTER AND PUBLISHER.

1910.

PRINTED AT THE GAZETTE OFFICE, FORRES.

CONTENTS.

PREFACE,		PAGE.
SERMON I.,	Colossians, Chap. i., Verses 1-2	1
SERMON II.,	Colossians, Chap. i., Verses 3-8	14
SERMON III.,	Colossians, Chap. i., Verses 9-11	27
SERMON IV.,	Colossians, Chap. i., Verses 12-14	41
SERMON V.,	Colossians, Chap. i., Verses 15-17	56
SERMON VI.,	Colossians, Chap. i., Verses 18-20	71
SERMON VII.,	Colossians, Chap. i., Verses 21-23	85
SERMON VIII.,	Colossians, Chap. i., Verses 24-25	98
SERMON IX.,	Colossians, Chap. i., Verses 26-27	111
SERMON X.,	Colossians, Chap. i., Verses 28-29	123
SERMON XI.,	Colossians, Chap. ii., Verses 1-4	136
SERMON XII.,	Colossians, Chap. ii., Verse 5	149
SERMON XIII.,	Colossians, Chap. ii., Verses 6-7	160
SERMON XIV.,	Colossians, Chap. ii., Verses 8-10	172
SERMON XV.,	Colossians, Chap. ii., Verses 11-12	186
SERMON XVI.,	Colossians, Chap. ii., Verses 13-14	199
SERMON XVII.,	Colossians, Chap. ii., Verse 15	212

SERMON XVIII.,	Colossians, Chap. ii., Verses 16-23	225
SERMON XIX.,	Colossians, Chap. iii., Verses 1-2	237
SERMON XX.,	Colossians, Chap. iii., Verses 3-3	251
SERMON XXI.,	Colossians, Chap. iii., Verses 5-10	267
SERMON XXII.,	Colossians, Chap. iii., Verse 11	280
SERMON XXIII.,	Colossians, Chap. iii., Verses 12-14	293
SERMON XXIV.,	Colossians, Chap. iii., Verses 15-17	306
SERMON XXV.,	Colossians, Chap. iii., Verse 18 to Chap. iv., Verse 1	319
SERMON XXVI.,	Colossians, Chap. iv., Verses 2-4	331
SERMON XXVII.,	Colossians, Chap. iv., Verse 5	342
SERMON XXVIII.,	Colossians, Chap. iv., Verse 6	354
SERMON XXIX.,	Colossians, Chap. iv., Verses 7-9	366
SERMON XXX.,	Colossians, Chap. iv., Verses 10-14	378
SERMON XXXI.,	Colossians, Chap. iv., Verses 15-18	391

PREFATORY NOTE TO COLOSSIANS.

WHILE these sermons were prepared primarily to minister to the spiritual needs of the Congregation to which they were delivered, in thus treating the whole Epistle systematically the Author had in view the ultimate publication of the work. It was his intention to write a critical introduction to the exposition; but unfortunately this purpose and the final revision of the work had not been carried out when death intervened. The intrinsic worth of the work seemed, however, to justify its preservation in a more permanent form; and, therefore, when a number of friends expressed the hope that some of his writings would be given to the public, its publication was resolved upon.

The Epistle to the Colossians afforded a study peculiarly suited to the Author's tastes. With a range of knowledge almost encyclopedic in its extent, his first love in study, to which he remained devoted to the last, was philosophy; while the person of our Lord Jesus Christ was to him the centre and glory of our Christian faith. In both these respects this *Epistle* appealed most strongly to him. This exposition has, further, an added interest and value, as illustrating the method

of one who preached acceptably to a congregation representing at various times all classes, from the nobleman to the farm-labourer. The sermons were written out in full, with such a keen sense of the value of words that hours were sometimes spent in weighing a sentence ere it was committed to writing as a satisfactory expression of the desired truth. When written the sermons were read over carefully once or twice, and then preached entirely without manuscript. Largely on this account they have been published without the alterations and omissions which probably the Author would have made had the work been issued under his own supervision.

Thanks are due to the Rev. A. C. BUCHANAN, B.D., of Forres, who kindly undertook the correction of proofs and such editing as was required.

A. W. WATT.

I.

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colossae: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”—Colossians i., 1-2.

THE Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians, although not one of the longest of his letters, is one of the most deeply interesting. It is true that it is less of a familiar and friendly letter than some of the other letters of the Apostle are, true also that it is in style somewhat more laboured and formal than is usual with him. St. Paul was not on the same terms of close intimacy with the Colossians as he was with the Ephesians, for example, or the Thessalonians, and hence his letter to them was, as might have been expected, more constrained than it would have been had he known them better. Besides this it was less of a letter than of a short treatise in letter form, and therefore it was written in a more laboured manner than that in which a more ordinary letter would have been written. But although we do not find in St. Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians that free outpouring of his spirit which we find elsewhere, we do find in it a stately eloquence which

impresses us, and an unfolding of the doctrine of our Lord's divinity which has hardly a parallel even in Scripture itself. Indeed we may say that in the Epistle the great theme, handled with consummate care, is the divinity of Christ. There are subordinate themes, but this is the chief, and it is much to have this great theme handled with so splendid care and with so admirable fulness. We regret less than we should otherwise do the want of St. Paul's usual rush and fire, when we find him devoting such patient care to set forth in fitting words the divine and eternal glory of our Saviour.

It is my purpose to draw your attention from time to time to the great thoughts to which the Apostle gives expression in the first chapter of this Epistle, and I begin with the opening words, the words of kindly greeting in which he addresses the Colossian Christians. And in drawing your attention to these words I desire to speak to you first of the people to whom St. Paul wrote and secondly of the blessings for their possession of which he prayed.

I. Let us consider then, in the first place, the people to whom St. Paul wrote and why he wrote to them.

His letter is addressed "to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colossae."

The city of Colossae lay in that portion of Asia Minor which was known as Phrygia. Some thirty miles south of Ephesus, that famous city where St. Paul laboured so long and so successfully,

lay the city of Miletus. Its name will be familiar to you, for it was there that after his third great missionary journey, and on his way from Greece to Jerusalem, Paul tarried for a little and awaited the coming of the elders of the Ephesian Church. It was there that, anticipating the grave trials which awaited him, he bade these beloved brethren what he believed to be a last farewell. Miletus lay on the banks of the river Mæander, near where it falls into the Ægean Sea. Following this river far up its winding course, one would at length reach a spot on its southern bank—more than 100 miles in a direct line from the sea, where it received a small tributary stream, the Lycus. This little river flows through a valley that has been much visited by earthquakes, and at one part of its course it actually disappears and flows for a considerable space underground. Its waters contain such a strong solution of lime that in many places it is actually bridged over by its own beautiful and gleaming deposits. For these things alone might the valley of the little Lycus have been famous, but it had this further distinction that three famous and wealthy cities were situated in it. Near where the Lycus joined the Mæander was the splendid city of Hierapolis; six miles further up the Lycus stood the great and wealthy Laodicea; and yet ten miles up the river's course rose the ancient and once very famous Colossæ. Before St. Paul's time the glories of Colossæ had somewhat faded, but it was even in his days a place of importance. It was in

this old city of the Lycus valley that there had been formed that Christian Church to which the Epistle of our text was written.

We cannot have any certainty that St. Paul had ever visited the Lycus valley and its great cities. It would almost seem from the first verse of the second chapter of the Epistle that he had not done so. He says there, “For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh.” Now he seems to include, in these words, among those that had not seen his face in the flesh, the Laodiceans and the Colossians. Possibly this may be questioned, but it seems to be confirmed by what is said in the fourth verse of the first chapter. “Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus” are the words which St. Paul there employs, and had he himself planted the Colossian Church it surely would have been more natural for him to speak of having seen the faith of the Christians of Colossae. I am not prepared to say positively that St. Paul had never visited Colossae, but from the expressions which I have quoted I think it is more probable that he had not. He certainly had been in Phrygia, and Colossae is a Phrygian town, but he seems to have passed through the eastern part of the country, while Colossae is in the extreme west. And yet, if he never visited Colossae, we may well believe that he had often had a desire to visit it. There was much to attract him to the valley of the Lycus, and during the

years he was at Ephesus he was not two hundred miles distant from it. I do not suppose that the natural wonders of the valley would have formed any special inducement to him to visit it. There is nothing written by the Apostle or about him to lead us to think that he was deeply impressed either by the beauties of nature or the glories of architecture. His defective vision, for beyond doubt he suffered from partial blindness, may account largely for his seeming indifference to the beautiful in nature and art; but most of all is this to be accounted for by his entire devotion to his apostolic work. He could think of nothing but his work of proclaiming the gospel to men, could see nothing, as it were, but the people to whom he was under a sacred obligation to preach Jesus and the resurrection.

But, although the wonders of the Lycus valley might attract him but little, the three great cities of that valley, with their teeming populations, would attract him much. And yet he seems to have been a stranger to these cities, often as they were mentioned in his prayers. Why he did not visit them we cannot tell. This only appears, that it was his wont to look for some divine intimation as to where his path of work might lie, and that the hand which pointed out that path to him did not point toward Laodicea and Colossae.

On the whole then it seems likely that the Churches in the Lycus valley, the Churches of Hierapolis, Laodicea and Colossae, were not directly founded by St. Paul. Their founder seems to have

been Epaphras, of whom St. Paul says, “As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ” (i. 7). And yet although St. Paul was not the actual founder of the Colossian Church, I have little doubt that it owed its origin indirectly to him. Ephesus was not so far from Colossae that its great temple would not attract worshippers from that city, or its busy markets would not draw traffickers from it. Now we may well believe that while St. Paul was preaching at Ephesus, certain Colossians, visiting the city for purposes of trade or of worship, heard him preach and became Christians under his preaching, and that Epaphras and Archippus and Philemon were among these. Returning to Colossae these converts would tell the glad tidings which they themselves had heard, and thus the Church at Colossae would be founded. St. Paul—to change the figure—had kindled the torch at Ephesus, other hands had borne it on.

Thus then it came to pass that there were saints and faithful brethren at Colossae, some of them known to St. Paul and his own children in the faith, many of them probably unknown to him, but all dear to him for the Master’s sake. But if the relation of St. Paul to the Colossian Christians was less near than was his relation to certain other Christians, why was it that he wrote an Epistle to Colossae? Partly, no doubt, because the Colossian Christians owed in a measure the Gospel to him, but mainly because they were in danger of being

led astray from the faith. There had come to Colossae a certain teacher (perhaps certain teachers) who was seeking to imbue the minds of the people with pernicious error. He was exhorting them to worship angels, he was persuading them that full Christian knowledge was the heritage of the few, he was insisting on the necessity of ascetic practices in order to the perfecting of the Christian life, and he was seeking to impose on them the observance of Jewish rites and ceremonies. Now St. Paul saw in the presence of this teacher a disturbing element, an element fraught with danger. He saw that if men were to give heed to him, they would be led away from their true homage to Christ. Therefore was it that he wrote to Colossae, to guard the brethren there from the danger to which they were exposed. And in writing to these Colossian Christians he did not so much refute error as teach truth. He set before them the full dignity and glory of Christ's person that men might see in Him one to whom their undivided homage might be given, in whom their sole trust might be placed. Let them recognise the full glory of Christ and they would not wish to worship angels; let them know that "Christ in them, the hope of glory," was the mystery that had been hid from ages and generations, but was now made manifest to the saints, and they would not crave for the teachings of a specious human philosophy; let them be well assured that they were complete in Christ and they would not seek in Jewish rites and ascetic observances the perfection

of their spiritual life. Let them, in brief, see truly what Christ was, and they would seek nothing which they would not find in Him. St. Paul wrote to the Colossian Christians just that he might keep them in perfect allegiance to the Saviour. So far as we can judge, error had not made much progress among them. The Apostle does not write as if it had done so. He addresses the Colossian Christians as saints and faithful brethren in Christ, he speaks of their faith in Christ and their love to all the saints, he declares that the word of the truth of the Gospel was bringing forth fruit in them. No, they were not deeply tainted with error, they had not yet been moved far away from the simplicity of the Gospel. Yet was danger near, and the Apostle could not keep silence. When the mere shadow of the bird of prey is on the ground the anxious mother-bird gathers her nestlings close under her wings, for she knows how swiftly the dread talons may strike, the cruel beak may rend, the deadly blows may fall. Even thus it was enough for St. Paul to know that danger was near the young Church at Colossae. He could not but eagerly make provision for that Church's safety.

II. We have thus seen why it was that St. Paul wrote to the Colossian Christians, let us now consider in the second place what were the blessings which he prayed that they might possess.

These blessings were grace and peace. "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

1. He besought for the Colossians the grace of God.

It is not easy, nor is it perhaps desirable, for us to attach a precise and exact meaning to the word "grace," that word which occurs so often in the New Testament. It is one of those great words that mean far too much to be capable of any short and simple explanation. Strictly speaking grace is favour, and the grace of God is God's favour manifested to men. But then this favour takes so many forms, has so many ways of manifestation, that it is only in unfolding what it does for us that we can really explain what it is. Even when we are enjoying earthly good, when we have health and daily bread and needful raiment and home happiness, and these are assuredly good things, we are in a true enough sense tasting of the grace or favour of God. For if grace is freely manifested kindness, then there is not any good thing we possess or enjoy, whether that good thing be temporal or spiritual, that is not possessed or enjoyed by grace. We have no merits, and therefore whenever God bestows any good thing upon us he bestows that by grace. But when we speak of grace we usually take the word as in a special way applicable to spiritual things. By the grace of God we ordinarily signify His whole kindness to us in Christ the Saviour. To pray then that God's grace may be with any one is to pray that God may, for Christ's sake, regard him with all fatherly kindness, and out of that kind and fatherly feeling with which he regards him may

supply all his spiritual needs and in every way spiritually sustain him. All men have certain common spiritual needs and every man has certain special and individual needs arising out of the peculiar circumstances of his life. All men need forgiveness, enlightenment, sanctification, but, as no man's circumstances are exactly the same as those of any other of his fellows, each man needs to be strengthened for the bearing of his own special burdens and the overcoming of his own special temptations. The man that is in deep sorrow needs consolation, the man that is pressed by adversity needs lifting above wordly care, the man that is prosperous needs to be guarded against the deceitfulness of riches. In this world of ours, where life is so often imperilled, the agencies for its preservation must be manifold. Here kindly women, with tender hearts and gentle hands, minister to the fever-stricken or the wounded ; here dauntless men plunge through the dense volumes of smoke to rescue the inmates of the burning house ; here the strong and the fearless launch the life-boat and toil through the breaking waves to save the imperilled crew of the stranded ship. And as the dangers that assail life are various and the agencies for saving it necessarily various too, so the dangers that assail the soul are various and the adaptations of grace to give deliverance from these dangers necessarily manifold. But there is no spiritual need, whether common to all men, or peculiar to the individual, which grace cannot meet. When

therefore St. Paul besought on behalf of the Colossian Christians the blessing of the divine grace, he simply prayed that these Christians might enjoy continually the divine favour, and out of that favour might receive the help that would meet each spiritual need as it arose. There were circumstances in connection with the Church at Colossae, when St. Paul wrote his Epistle, which were fraught with considerable danger to that Church, and he naturally prayed that the grace of God might be so manifested as to preserve the Colossians from this danger. But indeed he prayed that God's grace might be manifested to the Colossians in every way, that it might guard them, enlighten them, cheer them, uphold them, inspirit them, keep them faithful, prepare them for the eternal world.

And, my brethren, that blessing which St. Paul besought on behalf of the Colossian Christians we may well beseech for ourselves. Burdened by sin, assailed by temptation, liable to sickness and sorrow, do we not all need, and constantly need, the grace of God ? O ! let our earnest and constant cry be for that grace.

2. But there was a further blessing for whose bestowal on the Colossians St. Paul prayed, namely, the blessing of peace.

Peace, like grace, is a word of wide import—a word that means very much. It means reconciliation with God, it means all kindly feeling between man and man, it means the ending of class strifes and international wars, it means peace of mind. In

our text it specially means, I think, freedom from all division in the Church and that inward calm which is so rich a blessing. In the Church at Corinth there was much division, party contending with party, brother separated from brother. St. Paul prayed that it might not (and there was a danger that it might) be so at Colossae, but that the spirit of love and brotherhood might reign there. And he prayed also that in every heart there might be, not the self-satisfaction of the formalist, of which there was a danger, but the sweet and holy joy springing from the sense of reconciliation with God and deepening with the deepening of the spiritual life. O ! blessed the state of that Church in which no contentious voices are heard, in which no divisions are known, and in which the individual heart knows the sweetness of peace with God. Such a Church might be assailed by persecutions, might have to pass through bitter trials, but the happiness of its members would be secure notwithstanding all. St. Paul's prayer was that this blessing of peace might be richly enjoyed by the Christians at Colossae. And we too should pray that this blessing may be ours, that we may live in brotherhood, that we may all have the peace of God shed abroad in our hearts.

And when we seek grace and peace from God, let us seek them through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him all spiritual blessings come to us. It was through Him, and not through angelic mediators, that St. Paul prayed that grace and peace might come to the Colossians, it is through Him that

our prayers for grace and peace should ascend on high.

In His name let us ask that grace and peace may be ours, and if we ask in faith they will be ours. God will sustain us and comfort us and guide us, will give us the needed grace for every day, the special grace that is needed in the specially trying hour, and amid all the changes of this changing world will gladden us with His own heavenly peace.

II.

"We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the Gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth: as ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit."—Colossians i., 3-8.

THERE is probably no one who does not feel his own burden sufficiently heavy. Our brethren's burdens may be heavy enough, but we do not know them as we know our own, and our own usually appear to us all that we can bear. And probably there is no one who goes through life without a burden. There are people who appear outwardly happy enough, whose faces are not lined with care, whose speech is usually free and cheerful, and of whom many might be ready to predict that they had never known anxiety or sorrow. Yet the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and even these seemingly joyous and light-hearted people may have secret griefs and burdens of their own. But although every man has his own burden and

doubtless deems that burden enough, there are those who unquestionably have burdens compared with which those of other men are absolutely trivial. And I know not if any one ever had to bear a heavier burden than the Apostle Paul. I am not speaking now of his burden of sorrow—of sorrow because he had once been a blasphemer and a persecutor—although we know that that burden was far from a light one. I am speaking of his threefold burden of labour, suffering and responsibility, that threefold burden to which he alludes when he says, “In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft . . . Besides these things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the Churches.” The Apostle had a great burden of labour, long missionary journeys, public preaching, teaching from house to house, toil even with his hands. He had too a great burden of suffering, buffetings, imprisonments, spoilings of goods, hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness. And besides he had a great burden of responsibility, for he was the Apostle of the Gentiles, and all the Churches of the Gentiles in Europe and Asia demanded his care. A minister of the present day feels that it is no light burden of responsibility that is laid on him when the care of one small Church is committed to him; think of the burden of responsibility that he had to bear to whom all the Churches of the Gentiles looked for guidance! Let us omit for the moment all thought of St. Paul’s burden of

suffering, and all thought of his burden of personal labour, and think only of his burden as overseer of all the Gentile Churches, and we shall see, even then, that he had far more to bear than most men have. Now when we call to remembrance how much was laid on St. Paul when the care of all the Churches was laid on him, how many must have been his hours of anxiety, how often he must have been borne down by sorrow, how frequently he must have halted tremulously between hope and fear, we can well understand what joy and relief it must have given him when good tidings were brought to him from any of the Churches. We have an illustration of this in that passage which forms our text. Epaphras had come to him from Colossae, telling him of the faith and love of the members of the Church there, and what he heard had filled his heart with gratitude and joy. “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints.” It is true that the tidings from Colossae were not tidings of unmixed gladness; there were intimations of danger to the peace and well-being of the Church, but there had been no serious defection, as yet at any rate, from the faith, and therefore there was little to mar the Apostle’s thankfulness and joy.

We think then of the good tidings from Colossae, and of the thankfulness which these tidings awoke in the Apostle’s heart.

I. Let us think first then of the good tidings from Colossae.

There had come to St. Paul, during his imprisonment in Rome (Caesarea ?), his friend Epaphras of Colossae, the faithful minister, as St. Paul calls him, and the founder in all likelihood of the Church in that city. Whether he had come expressly to visit St. Paul, or whether other business had brought him to Rome, we cannot tell, but we know that he was not ashamed of the aged prisoner, who was doubtless his own father in the faith, that he had sought him out, and not only sought him out but, it would appear, shared, in some way, his imprisonment. St. Paul, although a prisoner, was not confined in any of the public prisons of Rome, but lived in his own hired house under close military surveillance, and from the term which he employs regarding Epaphras, namely, "our dear fellow-servant," which may well mean "our dear fellow-prisoner," and from the fact that he calls him "fellow-prisoner" elsewhere, it seems probable that the Apostle's captivity was shared, for a time at least, by that devoted Colossian minister. But whether Epaphras shared, or did not share, the captivity of St. Paul, he certainly sought him out in the lodgings where he sat chained to the soldier that kept guard over him, and brought to him tidings that were of no little cheer to him in his captivity. It was the tidings of the great triumph of the Gospel in Colossae. In that Phrygian city "the word of the truth of the Gospel" had not

been proclaimed to unwilling ears. We know that the reception accorded to the Gospel at its first proclamation is not always a hearty one. Some men hear it with absolute indifference, some with an amused incredulity, some with undisguised contempt, some with open hostility. When St. Paul himself preached on Mars' Hill at Athens to the most intellectual and cultured assembly that he ever addressed, some mocked, and others said, "We will hear thee again of this matter"; few indeed believed. And often his entrance into a city to proclaim the glad tidings, which should have brought joy to all hearts, was the signal for an outburst of fierce popular fury. And in all the ages since the Gospel was first preached to men its messengers have often had kindred experiences to those of the great Apostle of the Gentiles. But at Colossae it would seem that from the first the reception of the glad tidings had been hearty and cordial. St. Paul distinctly says that the word of the truth of the Gospel had brought forth fruit in the Colossian Christians from the day they heard of it. Epaphras had not had to say of his fellow-citizens, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" They had heard and believed. Epaphras was able to tell his father in the faith of a community that had welcomed the Word, and whose members, knowing the grace of God in truth, were living in faith and love. The imprisoned Apostle was, indeed, at the time when Epaphras came to him, hearing many a cheering

report of the triumphs of the truth. He was himself in bonds, but the Word of God was not bound; nay, free and freedom-giving, it was spreading through and beyond the whole Roman world. It was being borne wherever the white sails of the merchant barks glistened over the blue waters that washed the shores of Europe and Africa; it was being carried wherever the distant highways resounded with the tramp of Roman soldiers; it was penetrating regions where the merchant and the adventurer as yet were almost strangers. And wherever it came it was making new the lives of men. It was awakening new hope in hearts that before had known but dull despair, it was healing discords, it was purifying life. Wondrous had been the triumphs of Rome, mighty had been that force which had subjugated free, proud peoples to the sway of the Imperial City, but here was a force, new and mightier than that of Rome, that was swiftly, if withal silently, subduing the world. It was then at the time when St. Paul was being cheered by reports of the signal spread of the Gospel through the Roman world, and of the abundant fruit that was being borne in the world wherever the Gospel had come, that he heard from Epaphras the good tidings from Colossae. Nor let it be deemed that these tidings were of comparatively small moment amid the so abundant intimations of Gospel triumphs far and wide. Good tidings from any section of the Church, from any region of that Gentile world that was being

won for Christ, were ever of vast importance to him on whom lay the care of all the Churches. The general to whom there has been committed the supreme command of the armies of a state looks eagerly for tidings from every quarter where these armies are employed, and hails joyfully the news of any victory. And St. Paul, concerned about the whole Church, and knowing that the prosperity of each part of it was of utmost moment, looked eagerly enough for some message from Colossae and felt a keen interest in what Epaphras had to disclose. And Epaphras was able to tell him of the faith and love of the Colossians. There were, alas! those in the Phrygian city that were endeavouring to unsettle the faith of the Colossian Christians, but as yet their efforts had been happily unavailing. The faith of the converts was fixed not on angelic mediators but on the Lord Jesus Christ. It was Christ that Epaphras had preached in his native city, and the fruit of his preaching was the faith of his converts. And, my brethren, that is the only true preaching which is the preaching of Christ, and that the only fruitful preaching which results in men's hearty faith in Christ. A man who has a certain measure of genius, a certain originality of thought, and a certain enthusiasm in setting forth his opinions, is likely enough to get people to listen to him, and to get more or fewer of those that do listen to adopt these opinions, whatever they may be. But it is one thing to set forth one's own opinions and get men to admire them and adopt

them, and quite another thing to preach Christ and persuade men to trust in Him. This was what Epaphras did; this is what all true ministers will seek to do. Christ, as Son of God and Saviour of men, is the true theme of preaching, and the true object of faith. Let us, like the Colossians, have our faith firmly fixed in Christ. Let it not be esteemed enough by us that we are well acquainted with Christian doctrine. To be so is good, but to know Christian doctrine may not be to know Christ. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the one thing that will make our lives true and our hopes sure. Let us then cling to Him as our Saviour and Guide.

But Epaphras was able to tell St. Paul of more than the faith of the Colossians; he was able to tell him of the love which they had to all the saints, and of the love which they had to the Apostle himself. The faith of the Colossian Christians was not a faith that was "dead, being alone." It was a living faith, a faith that moulded their lives. True faith is like the precious dew that revives and quickens all the herbage on which it rests. Let one truly trust in Christ and he must become pure and Christ-like, must become gentle and good. The Colossians learned to love all the saints when they learned to love Him that had died for all. I do not know much about the natural characteristics of the people of Colossae, but I do know that the spirit of the heathen world of St. Paul's time was not the spirit of love. National jealousies, class

jealousies, private feuds abounded. We may well believe then that before the Gospel came to Colossae, men knew little about brotherhood and charity. But the Gospel makes men new and when it came to Colossae the hard, unloving hearts were unloving no more. The masses of northern ice melt as they float southward amid warmer currents and under a brighter sun, and men's hard hearts remain hard no longer under the sweet influence of the Gospel. The Colossians learned to love all the saints, learned too to love the aged Apostle, from whom they had indirectly received the Gospel, and who now, for the Gospel's sake, was languishing in imprisonment at Rome. They had found out indeed that the end of the commandment is charity. My brethren, we too, if our religion is to be at all a genuine thing, must learn to love, to love all men, especially to love all saints. I am afraid that people often forget that love is the very crown of a religious life. They can see it their duty to be honest and temperate, to be chaste and truthful, but they cannot, in the same clear way, see it to be their duty to be gentle and kindly and forgiving. But it is our duty to love, to be patient, to forgive. O! that God would enable us all to feel and act towards each other in the true spirit of Christian charity, that He would teach us to subdue the fierce temper and control the unruly tongue, and find our highest pleasure in going about doing good.

II. Let us now consider, in the second place,

the thankfulness which the good tidings from Colossae awoke in the Apostle's heart.

His words are, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints," and again (verse 8), "who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit."

St. Paul identified himself so much with the Church which it was his office to serve, that its well-being was actually his well-being. There are people, by no means without piety, and in ordinary matters tolerably free from selfishness, who seem never to get beyond thinking about their own salvation. The salvation of others is of far too little moment to them. We should think poorly of that man who, when his country was endangered, would think only of how he might protect his own life and property, and would not have a thought to give to the protection of the land that gave him birth. And yet we are all of us apt to be very selfish in spiritual things. We are eager about our own salvation, little interested in the salvation of others. Not so St. Paul. Thankful beyond measure for the deliverance which had been vouchsafed to himself, he was most eager for others' good and he rejoiced in their deliverance from spiritual death. Hence when he had heard from Epaphras of the faith and love of the Colossian Christians he rejoiced as if their good had been his own. In his daily prayers he offered up in their behalf

thanksgivings to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who had quickened them and drawn them to Himself, offered up thanksgivings because he knew how much was involved in their coming to God through the Saviour.

No doubt the Apostle was very thankful when he heard of their love to himself (verse 8). It was cheering to him to know that there were those who were not ashamed of his chain. There is nothing more strengthening or cheering to a minister, after the thought of God's love, than the experience of his people's love. And O! how cheering it must have been to St. Paul, in the dreariness of his Roman imprisonment, to be assured that even those that had not seen his face in the flesh esteemed him highly in love for his work's sake. Yes, he doubtless thanked God for the love of the brethren. But it was not on his own account mainly that he was grateful. He rejoiced because new Gospel triumphs had been gained, because in one other region men had been won to the faith. He himself was in bonds and he knew not how soon he might have to bend his neck to the swordsman's stroke. But, in bonds and in utter uncertainty as to his earthly future, he could rejoice that the Gospel was being proclaimed far and wide, and winning triumphs on every hand. Leaders that have fallen in the moment of victory have yet died happy in the thought of the triumph of the cause for which they fought; and St. Paul, even as he wrote a prisoner, and all uncertain how soon he might be a

martyr, rejoiced that victory was still attending that glorious cause for which he had laboured and was suffering. He thanked God therefore for the good tidings which Epaphras had brought him, thanked God when he heard of the faith and love of the Colossians. And what made his thanksgiving all the more fervent was this, that the salvation of the Colossians was a matter not of the present only but of the future as well. It was much that these Colossians had faith in the living God and in the Saviour, much that they were leading new lives of purity and love, but it was even more that they could look forward to a life of eternal holiness and joy, a life in heaven. St. Paul gave thanks to God for the hope which was laid up for them in heaven. Earth might not have much to offer them more than it had had to offer himself. For many of them there might be waiting such an experience of bonds and imprisonment as that which had become his own. But whatever their earthly experiences might be, heaven assuredly awaited them. It was not in vain that they had trusted in Christ. They might have passing sorrows in His service: they would have joy at last. Beyond all the hardships of the desert the milk and honey of the promised land!

The words, "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven," are by some connected with the words coming immediately before them, "The love which ye have to all the saints," and then are taken as teaching that the hope which is common to all

the saints leads them to love each other. They look to spend eternity in one Father's house: what more natural then than that they should love each other here? Now this way of looking at the words, "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven," gives beyond doubt an excellent meaning. Yet I cannot but think it better to link the words with the third verse, and to take them as telling of that for which St. Paul rendered thanks to God. It was natural for him—large-hearted, loving, generous—to feel and express thankfulness that so many, who by nature were the children of wrath, were becoming heirs of glory. The generous-hearted man rejoices even in the temporal good of his neighbour; should he not much more then rejoice in his spiritual and eternal good?

My brethren, I have done little more than touch on the great and blessed truths which our text contains. And yet I trust I have said enough to remind you that Christ is all and to shew you that the good of our brethren should be of very great moment to us. O! let your faith be fixed in your Saviour; let your Christian love to each other abound; and let the progress of Christ's cause among men excite your liveliest gratitude and evoke your heartiest praise.

III.

"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God: strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness."—*Colossians i., 9-11.*

THE Church at Colossae, like other Churches in St. Paul's time, numbered among its members some persons whose presence was a continual source of danger to it. These persons were Jews who had, indeed, adopted Christianity, but who still clung to Jewish rites and ceremonies and wished the Christian Gentiles to conform to them. They moreover practised some form of asceticism, and commended it to others as in a way necessary to salvation, or at least to a higher life; and they not only did this but themselves were guilty of worshipping angels and sought to induce others to do the same. Moreover they laid claim to a special knowledge, possible only to be attained by an inner circle, and not by all. In urging on Gentiles the necessity of observing carefully Jewish rites, and in insisting on the efficacy of ascetic practices, these

men were really trying to make the cross of Christ of none effect; and in recommending angel-worship they were detracting from Christ's glory; for surely if it were impossible for a man to be saved without conforming to the Jewish ritual, and to certain bodily mortifications, then Christ's death could not be the sole ground of his salvation; and if angels were to be worshipped Christ was to be classed only as their equal and not as their Lord. Now the Apostle Paul, knowing what evil these Judaizing teachers were capable of doing at Colossae, wrote his Epistle to the Colossians mainly with the view of guarding them against these teachers. Though he did so, however, it does not appear that, when he wrote his Epistle, much evil had actually been done by these Jews, for the terms used by the Apostle are terms of warning rather than of reproof. The great majority of the Colossian Christians seem to have been walking worthy of God. Accordingly we find the Apostle opening his Epistle with words of commendation and thanksgiving, speaking with great gratitude to God about the faith, love and hope of the Christians of Colossae. In our text we find him alluding to the faith and love of which he had spoken so thankfully in the opening verses of his letter, and expressing in fervent and prayerful utterances his desire that they who had shewn such faith and love should rise to the full stature of Christian manhood. It had gladdened his heart to hear of their faith and love, and it was with him a matter of constant prayer that his heart might be

gladdened still more abundantly by the tidings of their growth in grace. He desired to hear of their progress in the true knowledge, and not in a vain philosophy, of their advancement in spirituality, and not of their subjection to forms and penances. And in telling them of his constant prayers for their spiritual growth, he entered minutely into the various elements in which Christian perfection lay. From what he told them, therefore, about the nature of his prayers in their behalf, we may learn what are the characteristics of a truly Christian life, characteristics to be prayerfully desired by every Christian minister for his people, characteristics to be prayerfully desired by every professing Christian for himself or herself. And our meditations at this time will have reference to the characteristics of a true Christian life. But before we proceed to the consideration of these characteristics we shall meditate for a little on the necessity of prayer in order to the living of a true Christian life.

I. Let us consider, in the first place, the necessity of prayer in order to the living of a true Christian life.

“For this cause,” says St. Paul, “we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you.” St. Paul wrote the Epistle to the Colossians, not indeed within the walls of a prison, but yet as a prisoner waiting his trial before the Emperor Nero. The hand with which he wrote the salutation to the Colossians was heavy with the chain which bound him to the soldier in whose

custody he was. He knew not what might be the result of his trial, for the Emperor Nero was a tyrant of the most odious character, who hesitated not to pervert justice in the most flagrant manner, and who had an utter disregard of human life. In such circumstances as these in which St. Paul was, laden with heavy fetters day and night, and knowing not how soon captivity might end in violent death, most men would have thought much about themselves and little about others. St. Paul never for a moment allowed himself to be absorbed in his own cares, but constantly cared for others. His prayers were not simple outcries for deliverance from the peril in which he was placed. Doubtless he cried to God to stand by him and deliver him out of the hands of cruel men, but that was not all he did. In his prayers he forgot no Church, he forgot no friend. The soldiers, to whom he was chained in succession, marking his lips moving in prayer and listening to his whispered utterances, heard him speak of Corinth and Thessalonica, of Galatia and Philippi, of Ephesus and Colossae, of Athens and Rome. They heard him speak of the friends who were around him in Rome and the friends who were far away; Jew and Gentile, freeman and slave being made mention of before God by him. For all he prayed that they might be blessed both temporally and spiritually, that their bodies might prosper and be in health and that their souls should be filled with true spiritual life.

It is of his prayers for the Church in Colossae

that he speaks in our text, and he says that his prayers for that Church were unceasing, and that they were prayers for the spiritual growth and perfection of its members. Now, why was it that St. Paul prayed so fervently for the Colossians? Why was it that, forgetful of his own bonds and dangers, he cried so earnestly to God for them and others? It was because he knew that it was only from God growth in grace could come to them, only God who by His Spirit could make them perfect. He knew that not the most careful setting forth of their duty before them, not the most earnest and fervent appeals to them, not the putting forth on their part of strenuous personal effort, could avail, apart from God's blessing bestowed on them, for their true spiritual advancement; and therefore was it that he so incessantly and fervently prayed for them.

My brethren, as we contemplate the Apostle Paul, pleading from his place of confinement for the Colossian Christians' spiritual advancement, may we not learn the great necessity of praying fervently for our own spiritual growth? May we not see plainly that we shall only be wise and fruitful and patient through the abundant shedding abroad in our hearts of God's Holy Spirit, and seeing this be led to pray without ceasing for our own sanctification? We may do much in the region of material things by the natural enlightenment and strength which we possess. We may not indeed make harvests grow without God's dew and His sunshine, but we may

reclaim earth's waste places and turn them into fruitful fields ; we may transform its pathless oceans into highways for our commerce ; we may tunnel its vast mountains and draw treasures from its dark recesses ; we may make its winds our servants and turn its most mysterious force into our sure and swift messenger. All this we may do and much more by the power and the intelligence which we naturally, although only by God's original gift, possess. But when we come into the region of spiritual things all this is changed. We cannot make ourselves holy, we cannot regenerate ourselves. Only God's Spirit can make us new creatures. What need then that we should pray earnestly, pray believably, pray perseveringly for wisdom and holiness ! If we neglect earnest and believing prayer, we can be nothing but spiritual wrecks ! It is well to be prayed for by earnest ministers, but what can their prayers avail us if we pray not for ourselves.

II. Having thus considered the necessity for prayer in order to our living true Christian lives, let us now consider, in the second place, the things for which we should pray, in other words, the characteristics of a truly Christian life unfolded in our text.

These are wisdom ; walking worthy of God ; and strength.

(1) WISDOM.

A true Christian must be wise. We find St. Paul saying, " For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to

desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."

A man, therefore, to be a true Christian must possess knowledge. We must mark, however, that the knowledge to be possessed by him is knowledge of a peculiar kind. It is not mere knowledge regarding worldly things, nor even a head knowledge about divine things, however great that knowledge may be. A man may be a profound thinker, an accomplished scholar, a very master in literature and science, even in a sense in sacred science, and yet be a thoroughly bad man, a man whose accomplishments have done nothing for him save in keeping him from gross exhibitions of his wickedness. Of course I do not say that a man is rendered worse by the possession of great accomplishments, by large acquaintance with literature and science. If he is a Christian man he is all the better for that, he is a man of learning. But mere earthly knowledge is not capable, excellent as it is in its own sphere, of making a man better and holier than he naturally is, and is never for a moment to be put in the place of the knowledge of our text. At Colossae the seducing teachers, of whom I have already spoken, wished to put a philosophy of the unseen indeed, yet only a human philosophy in place of that knowledge which St. Paul prayed that his readers might have. But the Apostle condemned their attempt, saying, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world

and not after Christ." The knowledge which St. Paul desired the Colossians to possess, and which forms part of the true Christian character, is knowledge of the will of God, a knowledge which men otherwise comparatively ignorant may possess in all its fulness. Without this knowledge there is no true Christianity, for how can a man rightly serve God without having a true acquaintance with God's will?

We have then to desire, to pray for, to seek after a thorough knowledge, for that is the full force of the word knowledge (*ἐπιγνώσις*) in our text, a thorough knowledge of the will of God. It is painful, my brethren, to witness the lamentable ignorance of some persons regarding the will of that God Whom they profess to serve. They either hear the preached word so listlessly or read the written word so seldom or so carelessly that they scarcely know anything about their duty to either God or man.

Some few general rules of life they, by the hearing of the ear, as one may say, know something about, but of the application of these rules to all the details of behaviour they know almost nothing. Let us see, my brethren, that we be not ignorant of God's will. Let us by earnest hearing, by thoughtful and daily reading, by sober meditation and by earnest prayer, strive to have a thorough knowledge of the divine will. Let us not be contented with a meagre acquaintance with it. St. Paul prayed that the Colossians might be

filled with the knowledge of God's will. Some knowledge of it they already had, but he desired that they should have perfect knowledge. Let us, too, seek to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, to know it not merely in its general features, but also in its particular applications to all the varying circumstances of our lives. Let us so know it as to be constantly able to decide how we should act. It is to know it so as to be able to decide how to act on all occasions, that is, to know it rightly. It is a practical, not a mere speculative, acquaintance with God's will which is spoken of in the text. "That ye may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding," are the Apostle's words. Now, when he speaks of wisdom, he shows that the knowledge of God's will which is to be desired is a most practical knowledge, a knowledge enabling one to determine how to act on all occasions, a Christian skill to apply the great general principle to all the special circumstances on which it bears.

Seek then, my brethren, such a full and thorough knowledge of God's will as will enable you to act in all things small and great in obedience to Him, and to leave undone nothing small or great that He would have you to do. And inasmuch as only God himself by His Spirit can give you a true knowledge of His will, ever pray most fervently that His Spirit may be shed abroad in your hearts. If you are full of God's Spirit duty will be plain and obedience natural to you.

2. WALKING WORTHY OF GOD.

But while all true Christians must be wise they must also walk worthy of God. "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." It is in order to render a thorough obedience to God's will that we should desire and pray for a perfect acquaintance with it. The man who knows what the Bible says about God's will, but who does not carry his knowledge into practice, is not a Christian. The true Christian walks worthy of the Lord.

He walks, that is, he pursues a steady onward course. His behaviour is not fitful, fickle, changeable. His life is not one thing to-day and quite another thing to-morrow, a life whose course is like that of the floating wreck, the sport of all winds and waves, a life without rule or order, a lawless, inconsistent life. He lives regularly and consistently, he follows a definite object, he is ruled by a powerful motive, his behaviour is marked by the same characteristics day by day. And the life which he leads thus consistently and regularly is a life of godliness. He walks worthy of the Lord. We often say of a great and good man, who has come of a father, or mayhap of a line of forefathers, equally great and good as himself, that he is worthy of his father or worthy of the name which he bears. So here the Apostle speaks of Christians walking worthy of the Lord, meaning thereby that in their lives they dishonour not His holy name by which

they are called or the near relationship in which they stand to Him. He is their Father in Christ Jesus, and they are called by His name. And this being so they do not follow such courses as would be dishonouring to Him as their Father, but on the contrary they show forth His glory by their behaviour. The Apostle tells us in what particulars their walking worthy of the Lord consists. They please Him, they are fruitful in every good work, they increase in the knowledge of Him. They please him. Their great object is to do so. Their ruling motive is the desire to glorify Him. They think not of their own pleasure, they ask not what will please men, they are only concerned to please God. They strive constantly to conform their lives to the demands of His Word, and the example of His Son. They are not contented with giving Him a little outward and seeming reverence. They seek to honour Him in everything. Nor are their desires to please God vain desires. They result in action. True Christians, although not perfect, are yet fruitful, fruitful in every good work. Theirs is not what we may call a mere negative goodness, a mere keeping apart from gross sin, nor is it the mere doing of one or two comparatively easy duties. They do keep apart from sin, but they also display zeal, and activity in good ; and they manifest such zeal and activity not in a few things only, but in every known duty. They are living branches of the true Vine, and being so they bear the rich clusters of good and holy deeds.

And in pursuing the path of duty, in striving to please God, and in bringing forth fruit to His glory, they increase in the knowledge of Him. They come to see His will more clearly, they come to know Himself better. In the path of obedience to an earthly parent or master we come to understand his will ever more fully and to have a fuller acquaintance with himself. Even so in the path of obedience to our Heavenly Father do we become able, as it were, to anticipate His desires, and grow into a fuller sympathy with Himself. O! then, my brethren, see that you as professing Christians crave the aid of the Holy Spirit that you may "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God."

3. STRENGTH.

The last characteristic of the Christian life set forth in our text is *strength*. "Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness."

They who are naturally weak and who are surrounded by powerful and deadly enemies need very powerful allies. And in what is man so weak, and wherein has he more dangerous foes to contend against than in the performance of spiritual duties? By his inherent sinfulness rendered powerless to do what he ought, and beset at once by the world, the flesh and the devil, what is he if there be not given him a strength which is not his own? Such a strength is, however, given to him when he is a

faithful follower of Christ. For then God's Spirit dwells within him and fits him to overcome both his own natural weakness and his multitudinous foes. If we are true Christians we are strong, for God himself makes us so. Nor does He strengthen us in one or two things only; He strengthens us with all might, so enabling us to be in all things more than conquerors. Endowed Himself with almighty power, a power which is one of the great elements of His glory, He imparts power to us, if we are His. And how does the divinely imparted strength shew itself in us? It shews itself in our "patience and long-suffering with joyfulness." Constantly recurring temptations, severe trials, and opposition or persecution soon exhaust the patience of those whose dependence is on the arm of flesh, even as the sun soon scorches the produce of the dry and shallow ground. But those whose dependence is on the arm of the Lord, and who are strong with His imparted strength, wax not faint nor yield in the war with temptation, become not impatient amid the gravest trials, sink not under the most protracted opposition or persecution. Nay, even amid grave trials they are joyful, knowing that these trials are, as it were, but the blows of the sculptor's hammer, which are fashioning the rough marble of their natures into forms of glory and of beauty. O! brethren, pray that you may be made strong to endure and to conquer, however grave may be your temptations, and to be patient and joyful, however many may be your troubles.

And now I conclude, praying for you, as St. Paul prayed for the Colossians, that you may be perfected in everything true and good. O! see that you all heartily trust in Christ, and trusting in Him see that you grow in knowledge, fruitfulness and strength. It is growth that manifests life. Grow ye, therefore, in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

IV.

“ Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light : Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son ; in Whom we have redemption through His blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins.”—Colossians i., 12-14.

THE words “ giving thanks,” which open our text, may be regarded either as giving expression to St. Paul’s grateful feelings for the spiritual blessings conferred on himself and those to whom he wrote, or as describing a certain feature in the character of all sincere Christians. St. Paul says in verse 3 of the chapter of our text, “ We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you ” ; and if we regard him as unfolding in verses 9-11 (in which he speaks fully of his prayers for the Colossians) the words “ praying for you ” in this third verse, we may regard him as unfolding in our text the statement of the same verse, “ We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

But, again, instead of regarding St. Paul’s words “ giving thanks ” as expressing only his own gratitude for what God had done for himself and

the Colossians, we may esteem them as intimately connected with the three verses preceding, as forming a part of the same prayer as that of which these verses form a part, and as expressing a desire, that that deep gratitude for salvation, which should fill the hearts of all true Christians, might not be wanting in the Colossians.

But whether we look on the words, “giving thanks unto the Father,” as expressing St. Paul’s own gratitude merely, or as expressing his desire that other Christians might be equally grateful with himself (which latter view is probably the better), this at least is certain, that there is to every true Christian, as there was to St. Paul, or to St. Paul and the Colossians together, abundant reason for “giving thanks.”

In meditating on our text let us consider therefore first the call to thankfulness, and secondly the ground of thankfulness.

I. The call to gratitude.

The Christian life should be eminently a life of thanksgiving. The more constantly and closely we ponder on the full meaning of all that is said in our text, the more reason do we see why Christians should be grateful to God; but a simple noting of its opening words, or at least a mere cursory reading of its statements about what God has done for His people, should convince us that gratitude, deep, strong, and unfading, is one of the most natural feelings in a Christian’s heart. For, although the more closely we meditate on our text, the more

clearly we see how great is that inheritance for which Christians are made meet, how fearful that bondage from which they are freed, how glorious that kingdom of which they become members, how wondrously valuable the ransom paid in order to their deliverance from bondage, and, seeing all this, see that Christians should be naturally moved to the cherishing of ever-deepening gratitude ; although such is the case, the bare mention of an eternal inheritance, of a great deliverance from bondage and merited wrath, and of the fact of this deliverance having cost the Deliverer His life, can hardly fail to lead us to see that there is ample room for fervent thankfulness in every one delivered. A mere glance at our text should shew us that above all things the Christian life should be not one of murmuring and gloom, but of joy and thanksgiving. Seeing then that the duty of gratitude on the part of all true Christians is so very readily perceivable, it cannot be out of place that, even before entering on any full consideration of the words of the text, I press on every sincerely religious man and woman the duty of gratitude for the wondrous acts of love so fitly and forcibly set down in it. I entreat such persons to cherish towards God thankfulness, deep and heartfelt, and yet not silent but oft-expressed thankfulness. That their gratitude should be expressed, the form of expression "giving thanks" shews. If then, dear brethren, the love of God has been shed abroad in your hearts, these hearts should be filled with gratitude, and this

gratitude should be outwardly shewn. It should be shewn in your frequent and fervent approach to God in private prayer, it should be shewn in the earnestness with which you worship God in the household and in the Church, whether the worship may consist in praise or in prayer. For although even the smallest spark of heartfelt gratitude is worth more than thousands of meaningless and hypocritical expressions of thankfulness, yet when gratitude is really felt in the heart it seems, apart even from Scripture's commands, a natural and right thing, and it is certainly a thing often enjoined in Scripture, that this gratitude be expressed in words of prayer and praise. If then this expressing of thanks to God is natural, right and Scriptural, how often should the Christian be on his knees before God in prayer, with how deep and fervent gratitude should he sing God's praises, with what sincerity should he join in the prayers of the family and the congregation, when they "praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men"?

Our text exhorts that thanks be rendered unto the Father, and this not because the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Ghost are unworthy of our highest gratitude, but because, though God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, "are the same in substance and equal in power and glory," yet in regard to men's salvation God the Father is ever looked at as "the beginning and efficient cause." Our salvation was purchased by

Christ's death, but it is the Father Who is spoken of as having "loved the world and having given His only begotten Son" for the salvation of every believer. "All things are of God."

If then, dear brethren, we are sincere believers in Christ and therefore redeemed by His blood, let us at all times be grateful, and let us frequently express thankfulness to the Father for the wondrous things which He has done for us. Too often do we look on the dark side of things and let our hearts sink. Rather let us look on the bright side and let them rejoice and be thankful.

II. Let us consider what we have to be grateful for (1) The blessing conferred, (2) The means taken in order to its being conferred.

(1) Let us, in order that we may be led to deeper gratitude, think for a short time on those things, for which our text teaches us that we have to be grateful and give thanks. Its words are: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." The words, "the inheritance of the saints in light," must, I suppose, be taken to mean "the kingdom of glory hereafter." The word "Saints" is not always used in exactly the same sense in Scripture; sometimes it refers to the angels, sometimes to the souls of believers, sometimes to believers on earth. It may be best to take it in our text as meaning simply "the holy," whether they be angels, spirits, or believers on Earth, and therefore to esteem "the inheritance of the saints in light,"

as the inheritance presently belonging in hope to all believers, presently possessed, though not yet in its full glory possessed, by God's Holy Angels and the souls of departed Christians and to be yet possessed by all God's faithful servants. "To be made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" is therefore to be fitted to possess and inhabit those mansions, which our Saviour tells us as are in His Father's house, and in which He is preparing a place for His own, those mansions on which there never falls the darkness of sin, sorrow, and death, those mansions in which all God's holy ones will dwell for ever and ever. Now, it can hardly fail to be known to all of us that we are not naturally fit to be partakers of this "inheritance of the saints in light," and hence the more glorious this inheritance—and its glories are unspeakably great—the more cause is there that they, who are made meet to be partakers of it, should feel grateful and should render thanks to Him Who hath made them meet. O, my brethren, who can contemplate without thankfulness "the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and unfading, in the heavens."

And as we go on to consider how He makes His people meet to partake the inheritance of the Saints, we shall see all the stronger reasons why they should continually give Him thanks. We have but to think of that from which He has delivered them and that to which He has brought them to see how thankful they should be. Think, I pray you, of that from which He has delivered

them. I said that men are naturally unfit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light ; and the middle verse of our text shews us that they are so because they are naturally under “the power of darkness.” “Who hath delivered us,” are its words, “from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son.” Now the fact of men’s being naturally under the power of darkness is clearly enough brought out in these words. It will in no way affect the meaning of the expression “power of darkness,” whether we hold it as having reference to the power of Satan or to the power of Sin; but it will perhaps bring out the contrast of the Christian’s natural, as contrasted with his regenerate state, if we take the expression in the former signification, and therefore hold (which Scripture quite warrants us in holding) that men are by nature under the power of Satan, and by him kept in darkness. Satan may, therefore, be regarded as allowed to hold in some mysterious way, and for reasons to us not known, yet not, alas ! without their own miserable concurrence, a certain measure of power over unregenerate men ; and to exercise this power in darkening their understandings and their consciences, in rendering them blind to their true interest and to their duty. His power is in our text called “the power of darkness,” and assuredly there is no name more applicable to it ; for he who walks in unbelief and sin gives many sad proofs that he is encompassed with so thick darkness that he cannot discern that which is becoming, right and

profitable, even although he may have talent, worldly wisdom, and learning. So much is he bound under the power of darkness, that is, blinded and deluded by Satan, that he regards sin as manly and becoming, or at least as pleasant and satisfying, while it is degrading, devilish and unsatisfying and results in bitter pain ; or that, if he has not a regard for open and unblushing sin, he wanders away from the pursuit of things which, were he freed from the power of darkness, he would see to be worthy of all earnest striving after, and pursues as if they were possessed of inestimable value, things worthy of only a limited degree of attention, such, for example, as worldly wealth and pleasure ; or that, again, when he has any thoughts about his soul's salvation, he either fondles the false hope that, apart altogether from the appointed way of salvation, God will be gracious to all His human creatures, or fancies himself—alas ! how vain a fancy—fit to satisfy all the divine requirements. Is it not then easy to see, my dear brethren, how unfit men naturally are to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light ? Enslaved by Satan, deluded and blinded by him, kept by him in the darkness of unbelief, ignorance and sin, how can they be fit for a kingdom of light, a kingdom of wisdom and purity ? Slaves of evil passions and lusts, what fitness have they for an inheritance where evil passions and lusts are unknown ; setting their hearts on this world's riches, honours, or pleasures, what meetness have they for a place where these riches, honours and pleasures

are not to be found ; full of pride and self-trust, how could they be prepared to dwell, where angel and archangel humble themselves before God continually; possessed by rebellious thoughts, how could they dwell where all is submission to the King of Kings? So long then as men are in their natural state, so long are they under the power of darkness, under the dominion of Satan, and therefore excluded from the inheritance of the saints in light. Brethren, have we ever bestowed our attention rightly on these words, so descriptive of the natural state of one and all of us, under "the power of darkness"? Have we ever taken it into serious consideration that many whom we love and admire, many possessed of amiable qualities and loving natures, many stained by no gross sins, but distinguished on the contrary for decency and integrity, are, notwithstanding all their gifts and graces, slaves of Satan, because they are without faith in God; that we ourselves, if we are not now converted and believing, are really in the same bondage? And have we ever thought, dear brethren, how debasing and degraded is this bondage; how miserable and pitiful a thing it is that those, who are capable of so much, so wondrously, higher things, that those who are fitted to become Sons of God should remain in the shameful position of slaves to Satan? Were the thought of the miserable position in which they are, who are slaves of Satan, to have a right hold on their minds, surely it would stimulate them to seek deliverance from

that position, in order that, being delivered from it, they might be translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, and thus become meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. And surely also a deep and overflowing gratitude should fill the heart of every one who has obtained such deliverance and has by translation into Christ's kingdom, which follows that deliverance, become so meet. What wonder, when we think on the miserable thraldom of men to Satan, while they are in their natural state, what wonder, we say, is there that St. Paul should call to hearty thankfulness every one delivered from this thraldom, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son?

Let us think not only of that from which God has delivered us, but also of that to which He has brought us. He has made us members of His Son's kingdom, the kingdom of light and peace, and, translating us into the kingdom of His dear Son, the Father makes us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, and makes it sure that we shall partake of this inheritance. For when we are translated into the kingdom of Christ we are freed from those things which render us, so long as we remain in our natural, unbelieving state, unfit to be partakers of the forementioned inheritance. For, as we have shewn, while we are in our natural state, we are under the power of darkness, and being so are slaves of lust and passion, worshippers of mammon, votaries of pleasure, or, if moral and respectable, at least filled with foolish vanity and

pride as to our own powers, and guilty, unconsciously so perhaps, but still guilty of rebellion against God, because refusing to accept His way of salvation. But when we are translated into Christ's kingdom an entire and blessed change comes over us; we are no longer the abject slaves of lust and passion, but are in a great and increasing measure victorious over them; we cease to be worshippers of mammon, and become worshippers of God; we cease to be votaries of mere worldly pleasure, and engage in the pursuit of higher happiness; we cease to be proud and vain, and become humble, just because we learn to trust in Christ and not in ourselves; we cease to rebel against God, and become His submissive servants; and being thus changed we become fitted for that place where holiness, love to God, and complete devotion to Him abound, but for which in our natural state of impurity, ignorance, pride and rebellion, we are wholly unfit.

And let us bear in mind, dear brethren, that the deliverance and translation spoken of in our text are present, not future. What St. Paul says is not that God will deliver and will translate, but that He hath delivered and hath translated. The kingdom of Christ, spoken of in our text, is therefore His mediatorial kingdom here, and the statement that God translated His people into that kingdom is equivalent to a statement that He prepares them here for the kingdom of glory hereafter. In the purity, trust and holy joy of the Christian here are laid the foundations of his eternal purity, devotion

and happiness. It is well that we should bear this fact in mind, for some seem to forget it. Some seem to think that on one's entrance into heaven he is in every respect completely changed; but such is not the case. In heaven his character, which has during a greater or less period on earth been growing more and more excellent, is perfected; and his happiness, which has been continuing to increase, is rendered complete; but the change through which he passes is not so great as to render his character and condition in heaven wholly unlike his character and condition on earth; and therefore, such being the case, it is proper for us to test the truth of our profession of Christianity by seeing whether it is producing in us those characteristics which we know mark the inhabitants of heaven. If these mark us, then may we know that God has delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son. And if we are translated into this kingdom, how much does it become us to feel and shew gratitude to God, who has done so wondrously great things for us. Above all, what fervent thankfulness should fill our hearts, when we remember by what means the deliverance and the translation of which we have been speaking are rendered possible, when we remember that they are only rendered possible by the fact of Christ having wrought out salvation for sinners, procuring by His own blood the forgiveness of their sins. On the great truth taught us in the verse which is the key-note of St. Paul's utterances

about Christ, I mean the fourteenth verse, I can at present say but a few words ; yet it is necessary that we bestow our attention on it shortly, in order that we may see how great cause there is that we should give thanks to God.

(2) Let us consider the means employed in order to the conferring of the blessing on us, for which means also we should be grateful.

Men are, as we have seen, naturally under the power of darkness and therefore unfit, from their character, for the inheritance of the saints in light ; and further than this, they are from the very fact of being possessed of this sinful character under God's wrath, and consequently by nature shut out from this inheritance. Now the first step that God takes in order to enable them to become meet to be partakers of this inheritance is to forgive, for the sake of the Son of His love, all their sins, and in forgiving their sins He changes His relationship to them, and becomes their reconciled God and Father ; after which it is, of course, impossible that they can remain slaves of Satan. Their deliverance from the power of darkness and their translation into the kingdom of Christ are therefore the immediate and most natural consequences of their being forgiven their sins. Now if we are thus redeemed, thus forgiven, what a call is there for thankfulness on our part, more especially what reason have we to thank God when we think how the forgiveness of sin is brought about. "In Whom" (that is, in Jesus,) says St. Paul, "we have redemption through

His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” In these words he teaches that not by ceremonial rites or ascetic practices, but by the blood of an unspeakably great sacrifice are we delivered from sin, teaches us that we need no angel mediators, having as our one mediator God’s own beloved Son, teaches us that in order to the forgiveness and deliverance of those who are by nature under the power of darkness. God gave up to death a Being of divine and infinite glory, gave up to death Him who has just been spoken of as His own dear Son. How deeply thankful then should we be to Christ, who gave His life for us; how thankful to the Father, the source and efficient cause of our salvation, who “spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.”

Thus then, my dear brethren, have we considered, step by step, the teaching of our text, keeping in view all along its opening words, “giving thanks,” and seeking to excite in our hearts feelings of deep and ever deepening gratitude, by the consideration of God’s wondrous mercy in the salvation of souls. But although we, unless every good and generous principle of our natures is uprooted, cannot fail to feel a measure of admiration for this so wondrous love of God, we are not in a position to render Him such thanks as St. Paul speaks of, unless what is described in our text has taken place in the case of ourselves. For if we are still under the power of darkness, it is mere hypocrisy and delusion to thank God for deliverance from this power. But, brethren, seeing that we

may have redemption through Christ's blood, that we may be delivered from the power of darkness, translated into the kingdom of Christ, and thus made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, why should one of us remain under the power of darkness, blinded, deluded, degraded, lost? O! let all that we know of the misery and degradation of sin and unbelief, all that we know of the love of God in Christ Jesus, so act on our hearts as to remove all unbelief, and lead us to cast ourselves wholly on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. And may that loving Father, whose power is so lovingly and so wondrously shewn forth in His delivering of men from the power of darkness and translating them into the kingdom of His dear Son, strengthen the faith and enliven the hope of each one of us that is already freed from the power of darkness, and translate into Christ's kingdom each one that is still in sad slavery to Satan and sin! And assuredly, if we are so delivered and so translated, a deep and holy gratitude will fill our hearts and shew itself in our lives here, and well forth in our joyous songs in that bright inheritance, for which God in His great mercy has made us meet.

V.

Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature: for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.—Colossians i., 15-17.

IN the earlier parts of the New Testament our Lord's humanity is brought before us with more prominence than His divinity. It is true that nowhere in Scripture is Christ presented to us as a mere man. Even in the first chapter of the first Gospel His divinity is declared, and all through the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, everywhere does He appear as more than mortal, as one whose flesh was but the veil of His divine and ineffable glory. But for all this He is in the earlier New Testament writings—in the three synoptical Gospels—very manifestly set before us as true man. To the fact of His humanity very great and, we may add, very necessary prominence is given. He is God indeed, but God with us, God incarnate. The fact of the incarnation, of the true humanity of Christ, has a most prominent place in the earlier portions of the New Testament. In the Gospel

according to St. John, however, and in the Epistles to a great extent, it is otherwise. In these Christ's humanity is doubtless put forward, but not so prominently as His divinity. He still appears as in the flesh, but it is as God manifest in the flesh. We behold Him as a true man, but in all His lineaments we discern a plain and unmistakeable effulgence of divinity.

In our text we have Christ's divinity, which is really the great subject of the Epistle, set forth with great clearness. It is true that in our text Christ's humanity is not forgotten. But the prominent place is given to His divinity. He appears before us, as it is meet that He should do when men were beginning to exalt angels to a rank almost equal to His, as the image of the invisible God, as the Lord of the Universe, existing before it and creating it for Himself. In our meditations, therefore, and in considering a text in which St. Paul goes right to the subject that was uppermost in his thoughts as he wrote to the Colossians, the subject, namely, of Christ's true divinity and sole mediatorship, we have to look at our Lord as the divine Revealer of the Father, and as Himself the Creator of all things, and as, therefore, the one true mediator and the one true object, with the Father and the Spirit, of men's homage and adoration. And as we meditate on this great theme, may our thoughts be guided and elevated by the Divine Spirit!

I. Let us, in the first place, meditate on our

Saviour as the true Revealer of the Father, and as such, because divine.

“Who is the image of the invisible God?” These words bring before us two great truths, the truth that God has around Him an inscrutable mystery, a mystery inscrutable not to men only, but to all beings whom he has created; and the truth that God, Himself invisible, has yet been revealed in such a way as not to be to His creatures an unknown God—has been revealed, that is, by His Son.

God is invisible. The bodily eye cannot behold Him, nor can the mind fathom the mystery of His being. Indeed, to angels as to men, God ever has been and ever must be the invisible God. He is so far above all His creatures, so remote from them by reason of His infinity and eternity, that they cannot by searching find Him out, that they cannot see and know Him. There are ever clouds and darkness round about Him, so that His creatures cannot behold Him. They cannot fathom the secret of His self-existence, they cannot penetrate the hidden glories of His nature. Both to sense and to thought He is the invisible God. How is it possible to see, or know, or understand Him who fills immensity with His presence, and Whose years are from eternity to eternity? He who stands on some Alpine height beholds around him a vast panorama of mountains and valleys, a far-spreading prospect which is in a large measure hid from him who lingers in the deep and shady vale at the mountain’s base. But even he who

looks forth from the lofty elevation sees but a small part of the great, round world, and even from what he sees can form but an inadequate conception of that world, with its broad continents and broader oceans, its icy hills, and plains where darkness broods through the lingering months, and its sunny zones where verdure and beauty love to dwell. Even so angels from the lofty heights of their purity and superior intelligence comprehend much regarding God which we in our lower sphere of character and intelligence cannot comprehend. But their vision has its limits as well as ours, and the infinite God transcends them as He transcends us. The finite cannot comprehend the infinite, the created the self-existent. We must all feel the truth of this. When we begin to think about God, do we not at once discover how truly He is the invisible God, the God whom the finite minds of men may adore, but whom they yet cannot know in Himself? It is true that we speak of God as infinite, eternal and unchangeable, but do these terms make us better acquainted with Him? What ideas have we of infinity and eternity? What clear conception have we of the unchangeable? Do not such words as infinite and eternal rather express our ignorance than our knowledge? Yes, God is the invisible God, the God Whose existence is not to be doubted, yet the God Whom we, with our finite powers, cannot comprehend, the God Whom, in the deep mysteries of His being, not even angels can know.

Must God then be to His creatures unknown ? Is that Being, in Whom we live and move and have our being, in no way to be manifested to us ? Or is He at best to be very dimly known through His works, known with a knowledge which yet is no knowledge ? Did the inscription on the Athenian altar, "To the unknown God," express an absolute truth ? Can we simply say that there is a God, without venturing to hold any ideas of what He is ? No, my brethren, God is not the unknown God, although He is the invisible God. Neither men nor angels can behold Him in the deeper mysteries of His being, in the infinity of His glory, in the remoteness of His self-existence and eternity. Yet can He be in a most true sense seen and known. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip ? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father, and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?"

"Who is the image of the invisible God?" We have in Jesus a revelation of the Father, so full and clear and perfect, that although He (the Father) is the invisible God, we yet may be said most truly to see and know Him. His invisible essence of course we cannot see, the mystery of His infinity and eternity and self-existence we cannot grasp, but we can see the brightness of His glory, if we cannot look on that glory itself; we can behold His image, if we cannot behold His person.

Christ is the image of the invisible God, or the Revealer to angels and men of God, Who is essentially invisible. I say to angels and men, for I believe that Christ's revelation of the Father did not begin with and is not limited to His revelation of Him to men. When John speaks of Christ as the eternal Word, He sets Him forth as essentially a Revealer. For words reveal what are the hidden thoughts of the heart, and hence the very name, "The Word," is suggestive of a work of revealing belonging essentially and peculiarly to our Lord. And as Christ is spoken of as the Word, absolutely and from eternity, we find it still more difficult to sever from our thoughts the idea of His being, in the very nature of things, a revealer of the mysteries of the divine Being and Character. To reveal God to all His rational creatures belongs to Christ, the Son, and has ever belonged to Him.

And as the name of "The Word," which John, through the Holy Ghost, gives to our Lord, suggests to us the thought that Christ is the Revealer of the Father, and that not merely in His humanity, but in His divinity and humanity both, and not to men merely, but to angels also; so also does the name of "the image of God," which St. Paul in our text gives our Lord, suggest to us the thought, not merely that Christ was to men in His own humanity, but that Christ is, in all the fulness of His personality, the Revealer of the invisible God. For St. Paul does not say of Christ that He *was*, but that He *is*, the image of the invisible God.

And the simple meaning of these words is that it ever has been, is, and will be Christ's part to reveal God, whom in all things He resembles. Apart from the only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, God would be absolutely invisible, unrevealed to His creatures. Nay, rather should I say, apart from Christ there would have been no Creation. But Christ is the image of the invisible God, in whom angels and men have the revelation of the Father. Of course we have chiefly to do with Christ as the Revealer of God to men, but we must remember that in taking human nature on Him, and in that nature revealing the invisible God to men, Christ is not performing an office totally different from that which strictly belongs to Him and which He has usually performed. To other beings Christ may have taken a different method of revealing God from what He has taken in reference to us, but He is everywhere and always and in the very nature of things the Revealer. To the universe He is the image of the invisible God, that is, not only in all things like God, but in all ways revealing God.

And He reveals God perfectly. Man is an image of God, an image, however, faintly at best shadowing forth God. But Christ is the image of God, the image perfectly revealing God. Whoever has seen Christ has seen the Father also, for Christ is the image of God, the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His person. There is no imperfection about the revelation of the Father which Christ makes. It is true that God can never

be thoroughly known by any of His creatures; but that is on account of their own finite and limited capacities. Christ's revelation of the Father is perfect as a revelation. In His person and attributes and work Christ fully reveals the Father. He is not an imperfect but a perfect image of the invisible God.

Tabernacling as a man among men, Christ revealed Him whom no man hath seen or can see. Even in His humanity Christ was the image, the clear and perfect image, of God. Whoso beheld Christ, even in the depths of His humiliation, had such a revelation of God as he could never otherwise have obtained, had a revelation perfect in its nature and as full as man's finite faculties could enjoy. We should never have truly known God save by His revelation of Himself in His only begotten Son, but Christ coming in the flesh revealed to us the mystery of godliness. And what Christ did even as man, He certainly does in the fulness of His twofold nature. He reveals not dimly, but clearly, not partially but fully the invisible God.

And Christ is able to reveal God fully, and this is what St. Paul especially insists upon, because He is Himself divine. You must mark, my brethren, how carefully the Apostle separates Christ from all creatures, how clearly he puts forth His relation to the Father. St. Paul calls Christ "the first-born of every creature." He does not say of our Lord that He is the first created of every creature, but that He is the first-born. All other beings and all

things are created ; Christ is not so. He is born, and born before all creation, for that is the exact meaning of the Apostle's words. And what can the words, "Born before all creation," mean but this, that Christ is not only before all creatures in dignity, but is the eternal Son of God ? From all eternity Christ has been the only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father, not separate from the Father in substance, but yet having a mysterious personality of His own ; in very truth one with the Father, and yet the first-born and only begotten of the Father. I dare not endeavour, my brethren, to shew how there can be a trinity of persons in the unity of the Godhead, but I am sure of this, that the words of our text, "The first-born of every creature," set forth our Lord as the divine Son of the Father. And if our Lord is the only begotten, the first-born, the eternal Son of God, then is He in every way fitted to reveal the Father. Who shall wonder at Christ being called the image of the invisible God or, in other words, the Revealer of God, who knows that He is God's eternal Son. And who will seek another mediator than Christ, or seek to divide Christ's honours with any other ? St. Paul dreaded lest some should do this. But surely our trust and our homage are for Him who is God with us.

II. Let us now, in the second place, consider our Lord as the Creator of all things, and as in creation revealing God, and also manifesting His own divine glory.

“For by Him were all things created, that are in Heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.”

These words were written by the Apostle to justify his use of the words, “The first-born of every creature.” Assuredly Christ must be the first-born of every creature, that is, before all creatures in rank and born before all creation, if He was Himself the universal creator. But while the words, “For by Him were all things created,” establish the fitness of the appellation applied to Christ, “The first-born of every creature,” they also, I think, have a bearing on the other expression, “The image of the invisible God.” For as God is the ultimate source of all existence, the only begotten Son, as the Agent in the creation and the upholder of all things, must image forth, reveal the invisible God. There is, therefore, a close connection between all the different parts of our text. The fact of the creation of all things by Christ is announced, not only to prove that Christ is the first-born of every creature, but to bring Him forward more prominently as the image of the invisible God. Not only in Himself, but also in His works of creation and providence and grace, is Christ the image, the Revealer of the Father.

The fact of the creation and upholding of all things by Christ, a fact so significant of His eternity

and of His office of Revealer, is stated by the Apostle with the utmost fulness and carefulness of particularization. St. Paul puts our Lord before us as the creator of heavenly things and earthly things, of visible things and invisible things, of intelligent beings of every grade, of all beings and all things throughout the universe. And he not only puts our Lord before us as the creator, he also sets Him forth as the upholder of the universe. “By Him all things consist.”

And while the Apostle is most careful in choosing such expressions, regarding created things, as will shew that the whole universe was originally created and is continually upheld by Christ, he is no less careful to choose such expressions, regarding Christ’s relation to the creation, as will shew how entirely He is its end, as will shew how entirely it is His. St. Paul says that all things were created in Christ, by Christ, and for Christ.

All things were created in Christ. The words, “For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth,” mean literally, “For in Him were all things created.” Now, when it is said that all things were created in Christ, it is clearly taught that Christ existed before all things, and embraced all things in Himself, and out of Himself gave being to all things. Christ the eternal, Christ the omnipresent, Christ, not only the agent, but, as between the invisible God and the universe, the very source of existence—such is the idea suggested by the opening words of the 16th verse.

The universe is not something out of Christ, so to speak, something enjoying a separate existence. It is in Christ, and existing by virtue of its being so. It was created in Him, and it subsists in Him, as the closing words of our text, "by Him," literally, "in Him all things consist," shew. But for the vital and sustaining energy coming forth from the omnipresent Christ, the universe never would have been, and could not now be.

Again, all things were created by Christ. This is stated in the close of the 16th verse. Christ created the universe. Things inanimate in all their varied forms, lower living creatures in all their vast variety, intelligent beings in their manifold diversity of endowment were all created by the word of Christ. They are as they are because He willed that they should be so. It was His power that called them into being, as it is His vital energy that sustains them. They were not created through any instrumentality, or by any delegated power. They were directly and immediately called into being by the first-born of all creation. They are His direct handiwork, His own creatures all.

Further, all things were created for Christ. It was as His own particular possession, His possession which He might guard and keep and bless, that Christ created the universe. It was for glorious purposes and ends of His own, ends of the most divinely gracious nature, that Christ created all beings and all things.

We see, then, how lofty is that relation in

which Christ stands to the universe. It exists in Him, it was created by Him, it was created for Him. There is neither being nor thing that is not Christ's. All things were created by Him. This world, with its varied tribes of living beings, its mighty oceans, its broad continents, its lofty mountains, its rolling rivers, is one of the smallest of His works. For when darkness has fallen upon the earth, space reveals its mysteries to us. The radiance of a thousand stars falls upon our delighted eyes, and each one of those stars is a world excelling almost immeasurably the earth, which seems to us so great. Nor are those stars, which meet our upward glance, the only worlds that roll in space. The telescope reveals to us tens of thousands of stars, so remote that the naked eye cannot discern them, and without doubt these are but a few of the radiant orbs whose lustre brightens the universe. And as all worlds are Christ's, created and upheld by Him, so all beings are His. All the lower and irrational living creatures, men bearing even amid their helplessness and failings something of the divine image, holy angels bright with eternal beauty and glorious in their excellent strength, all owe to Him their being. Ah! little knew men that He, Whom they contemptuously styled the carpenter's son, Whom they denominated an imposter and a blasphemer, nay, Whom they scourged and crucified, was the Prince of life, the first-born of every creature, in Whom, and by Whom, and for Whom all things were created. Yet even so it was. Earth

witnessed the maddened enmity of creatures against their creator, beheld the Prince of life die by the hands of those who only lived by His power. Christ is the Lord of creation and the Lord of providence, first-born of every creature, creator of all things, before all things, sustaining all things. “By Him were all things made, and without Him was not anything made that was made.”

Now, as we contemplate Christ in His glorious position of creator and preserver of all things, do we not see how fitly St. Paul speaks of Him as the first-born of every creature, and how fitly too he declares Him to be the image of the invisible God? How can one think of Christ as the creator of all things, in Himself and for Himself, without thinking of Him as eternal and divine, and without seeing His fitness, as being eternal and divine, to reveal the invisible God? Nay, who can think of Him as the creator of all things without seeing in Him, simply as the Creator, the Revealer of the Father, His revealer in the very act of creation? In creating the universe, He revealed the eternal thought of God, and also shewed the life-giving power, and the generous love of God, shewed that God was the fountain of life and the fountain of love as well. In other ways than the work of creation did Christ reveal the Father, but in that work He certainly imaged forth God.

Yet was it in Himself that most of all Christ revealed the Father. In Himself from the beginning angels had their revelation, in Himself, so full of

grace and truth, men beheld the image of the invisible God, saw the Father, whose only begotten Son He was. And O! surely if Christ alone could truly reveal God, He alone can be true mediator ; if even angels are His they are worthy of no glory beside Him. Christ—true Son of God and true mediator, that is the burden of our text. Brethren, do we long to see God ? Do we say with Philip, “Lord, shew us the Father and it sufficeth us ?” O ! let us come to Christ and He will shew us the Father ; in His own blessed person He will reveal the unseen God to us. Men have often sought many mediators. There is but one, and to Him let us truly turn, and we shall know God. And He will not only shew us the Father, but He will fit us for deeper and fuller revelations of Him hereafter. He will give to us that purity of heart which will fit us for the fullest vision of God. For to Him belongs creative power, and He will work in us the mystery of the new creation : He will create in us clean hearts and renew right spirits within us.

VI.

"And He is the head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead: that in all things He might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell; and having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."—Colossians i., 18-20.

IN verses 15 to 17 of Colossians i. we have Christ presented to us as the Eternal Son and Revealer of God, and the creator and upholder of all things; in our text we see Him in another, yet not a widely different aspect. For when our text sets Him before us as the head of the Church, and the instrumental agent of reconciliation to the Father, it still sets Him before us as the Revealer of the Father in His (the Father's) purposes of love, and as the author and upholder of the Church, even as of the universe. In giving Himself for the Church Christ imaged forth or revealed the Father, whose name is love; and in being the head of the Church and the beginning, and the first-born from the dead, Christ is all to the Church that He is to the universe. To the Church in particular Christ is what He is to the universe in general—revealer,

life-giver and upholder. He is indeed more, for He is reconciler, but He is all these. However, we do not mean to dwell specially on the analogy between Christ's relation to the universe and His relation to the Church, to meditate on our text mainly in its connection with the verses going before it. We desire rather to dwell on our text in its own specific teaching, to consider what in itself is Christ's relation to the Church, and what are the results of His bearing of this relation to it. Still, in our meditations we shall find, more than once, the analogy between Christ's relation to the universe and His relation to the Church set before us by the text. O! may we, in our meditations, be guided by God's Holy Spirit!

I. Let us consider, in the first place, the relation of Christ to the Church.

We read in our text, "And He is the head of the body, the Church: Who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead." Now these words not only tell us what Christ is in relation to His Church, that is, its head, but they also explain in what way He came to bear this relation. came to be its head. He is the head of the body, the Church, our text teaches us, inasmuch as He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead.

(1) Christ is the head of the Church, and is the head not simply as holding supreme authority over the Church, but also as bearing the most intimate connection with the Church. The word "head," as applied to the relation borne by one

individual to others, is a word of somewhat extensive significance, and sometimes it denotes little more than mere authority and command. At other times it denotes not only superiority, but also close connection. The head of a state or of an army is head in the sense of bearing authority; the head of a family is head in a fuller sense, in the sense of blood relation. Now, the two ideas of eminence and authority on the one hand, and of close connection on the other, are suggested to us by the use of this word "head" in our text. For, you will mark, it is not simply said that Christ is the head of the Church. Had nothing more been said than that, nothing more might have been inferred than that Christ ruled and swayed the Church. But when it is said that Christ is the head of the body, the Church, it is plainly to be inferred that Christ and the Church are one, that they are as truly united as in a man, head and body are, that they have not separate lives, but one and the same life.

Christ is the Church's head in the very fullest sense of the word; the Church's head as holding the supreme authority over her, the Church's head as one in life with her.

(a) Christ is the Church's head as holding the supreme authority over her. He is the Church's lawgiver and the Church's ruler, and fitly so as the Son of God. Yet He is the Church's head, not simply as the universal creator and preserver, but in a manner peculiar and special. And to Him alone it belongs to rule the Church. We are all well

aware that the Popes of Rome have, with ever increasing arrogance, claimed for themselves the headship over the Church of Christ, not indeed absolutely to the exclusion of Christ's headship, but under the profession of ruling as Christ's vicegerents. And we are aware too that some monarchs have claimed for themselves, and have been supported widely enough in their claiming of, headship over certain sections of the Church. But the claim of pope or king of lordship over God's heritage is a claim never for a moment to be entertained. There is but one head over the Church, and that is Christ, and neither priest nor king can shew any justification of his pretensions to be regarded in any way even as a head under Him.

For all the Church there is but one king, one head, the only begotten Son of God, the creator and upholder of all things. No angel even can be regarded as in any way sharing with Christ in His authority over the Church. The Colossians were in danger of worshipping angels and unduly exalting them to a place beside Christ. It was folly. To the Church Christ is head over all things. His word is the Church's light, His will the Church's law, His service the Church's work. Perish that spirit of masked rebellion that, under pretence of the better carrying out of Christ's designs, would put another in His place! The Church needs no head save the Lord Jesus Christ, Whose presence abides with her to the end, needs no authoritative voice of man to guide and control

her, when she has Christ's own infallible word as her authority. Let us, my brethren, acknowledge for the Church no head save Christ, but let us see that we give to Him, who is its true head, our unbroken, undivided allegiance. Whatever He has spoken, that let us do, and do at whatever difficulty and whatever cost. We are only true Christians when in all things we obey Christ as supreme in the Church. We may repudiate formally the headship over the Church of any other than Christ, and yet may not give Christ a true and hearty allegiance. O! let us see that heartily and entirely we bend ourselves to His authority, and conform ourselves to His will!

(b) But while Christ is the Church's head as holding the supreme authority over her, He is also her head as bearing closest connection with her. The Church is mystically Christ's body and He is mystically her head. Speaking in a mystery we may say that Christ, along with His Church, is but one glorious person, one person perfect in all its parts, one person lacking nothing to give to it the most exquisite symmetry and completeness. I have discoursed to you, my dear brethren, so often regarding the unity of Christ and Christians that I need not at this time speak at great length about that unity. But I must not pass by unheeded the glorious declaration that Christ is the head of the body, the Church, a declaration which is so instructive as to the Church's union with Christ. Apart from Christ the Church would be but a dead

and unshapely mass, but through her union with Christ the Church is possessed of life and beauty. Christ is the Church's living head; she Christ's living body. From Christ flow down into the Church all gracious and lofty impulses, all wisdom and zeal, all grace and truth. One life animates Christ and the Church, one Spirit, even the Spirit of God, dwells both in Him and it. In the human body the head directs and controls every member. There is no part of the body which is not, by the nervous system, connected with and influenced by the head. No motion, even the slightest, of hand or foot takes place without the brain having originated that motion, and, as it were, transmitted the influence to produce it to the part in which it takes place. The head is thus to all the body the seat of vital force and energy, and is connected with the most remote parts of the body from it no less than with the nearest to it. Hence, when Christ is called the head of the body, the Church, it is made plain that He is intimately connected with the whole Church, and that the whole Church owes all its living energy and power to Him. The very authority over the Church, which He exercises, belongs to this living connection between Himself and the Church. As the head exercises authority over the whole body, being fitted to do so from its wondrous connection with every part of the body, so from His mysterious yet real connection with the Church, as its living head, is He fitted to exercise supreme authority over it.

In every way, then, is Christ the Church's head, watching for it, guiding it, controlling it, filling it with His living power, animating it to all the noble work it has to do.

(2) And Christ is the head of the body, the Church, because He is "the beginning, the first-born from the dead." He gave the Church its existence here, and as the first-born from the dead He gave it the certainty of a glorified existence hereafter.

(a) Christ is the beginning, that is, not merely the first in rank within and the first perfected individual belonging to, but the very founder and former of the Church. He is the Church's originating cause. As creation was in Him, and by Him, and for Him, so the Church was in Him, and by Him, and for Him. It was in hope of and in preparation for His coming to die for men that the Church existed in the patriarchal and the Mosaic economies. It was by Him that the faithful before His time were called and blessed. It was through the Holy Ghost, sent forth by Him, that ancient prophets spoke. It was by the shedding of His blood that the Church received acceptance with God, and by the outpouring of His Holy Spirit that Apostles were enabled to preach the Gospel. It is by His power that the Church is preserved in the world, and that her boundaries continue to extend. But for Christ there would not be now, and there never would have been a Church on earth. The Church belongs to the new, the spiritual, the heavenly creation, and that creation, no less than

the old, is by Christ. As Adam was the beginning of mankind, not only as the first man, but as the fountain, as it were, of humanity, so Christ is the beginning of the Church, not merely as the first in rank and the first in order in the Church, but as giving to the Church its origin, its existence. He is the very source and fountain of its being.

(b) And even as Christ is the beginning of the Church, that is, the author and source of its existence as a Church, so too is He the first begotten from the dead, that is, the author and source of its resurrection life. Christ is the first-born of every creature, that is, He was before all creation, and He gave to all dependent existence its origin: and, in like manner, He is the first-born from the dead, taking the precedence in the resurrection and being the source of resurrection life to all His Church. The resurrection order of things is a new order of things, a new universe, or new creation, as it were. And this new creation is also in, and by Christ, the first-born. And, even as in reference to the old creation, Christ was before all and originating all, so in reference to the new creation He is before all and originating all, before all, as raised from the dead by His own power, and originating all, as giving resurrection life to His Church. When it is said that Christ is the first-born from the dead, it is not only pressed on our attention that Christ was Himself the first to enjoy the glorious resurrection life, but it is also suggested to us that Christ's rising is the pledge,

and more than the pledge, of the risen and glorious life of the Church hereafter.

Now, when we thus see Christ as the beginning and the first-born from the dead, do we not perceive how natural it is that He should be called the head of the body, the Church. If the Church here below is Christ's, by being founded and formed and nourished and guided by Him, if the Church hereafter will be glorified through Him, who but He has the right to rule the Church, whose life, save His, animates the Church; from whom, save Himself, can come the influences that move the Church? Yes, Christ is the head. And fitly so. It was meet that He, who was pre-eminent in the universe as first-born, creator and upholder, should be pre-eminent in the Church as well. It was only becoming that in all things He should have the pre-eminence. He, the image of the invisible God, and He only, was fitted to be pre-eminent in all things; and He took the headship of the Church, in order that in all things, in the Church, as in creation, in the new creation as in the old, He might have the pre-eminence.

Look up then, brethren, to this great and glorious head of the Church, with living faith and deepest reverence. Cling to Him that you may have life from Him, and obey Him as it is meet you should obey one who is in all things pre-eminent.

II. Let us now note, in the second place, that Christ's relation to the Church is one productive of

loftiest good to the Church and indeed to the universe.

It was that He might lift the Church as His body into the participation of His own glory and joy that our Lord became her head. And it was not the Church only that He sought to benefit when He took her as His body, and became her head. He aimed at the good of the whole universe, He sought to bring all things nearer to God.

Now, in seeking the good of the Church and the universe, Christ was still the image of the invisible God, the Revealer of the Father. In seeking to bring men back to communion with God, and to bring the unfallen into closer union with Him, Christ was but carrying out the Father's purposes, revealing the Father's will. We read, "For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell ; and having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself ; by Him, I say, whether they be things on earth, or things in heaven." Now these words teach that it was God the Father who made peace through the blood of Christ's cross, that it was God the Father's design to reconcile all things to Himself, and therefore they plainly teach that Christ, in shedding His blood on the cross, and in being the agent of reconciliation, was the Revealer of the Father.

Our text teaches us two things regarding Christ as the Revealer of the Father in His purposes of mercy. It teaches us that He had all

fulness dwelling in Him, and it teaches us that it was by His blood that reconciliation was made, and it teaches these not as separate, but as closely connected truths.

It teaches us that all fulness dwelt in Christ. "For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." Now these words have, doubtless, a retrospective force, a bearing on what has been said before. They shew Christ's absolute fitness to have in all things the pre-eminence, they shew the Father's will that He should be head of the Church. The Father was pleased that all fulness of glory should dwell in Christ, and that, therefore, He should be the head of the Church and the first-born from the dead, as He was the first-born of every creature and the creator and upholder of all things. But while the words, "For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell," have a retrospective force, they have much more a prospective force. They bear more upon the words following than they do upon the words going before. It pleased the Father that in Christ, as the head of the Church, all fulness should dwell, in order that He, the Father, might make peace through the blood of Christ's cross. It pleased the Father, that in Christ in His relation to humanity, in Christ the Revealer of the Father to men, in Christ the mediator of the new covenant, in the Christ of Bethlehem and of Calvary, in the man Christ Jesus, all fulness of grace should dwell. It pleased the Father that in Christ in His manhood, no less than

in Christ in His divinity, all fulness of grace, all fulness fitting Him to be men's Redeemer, should dwell. If it was needful that man should have a mediator, and that this mediator should offer himself as an atoning sacrifice, then was it also needful that this mediator should possess all fulness of compassion for those whose mediator he was to be, that he should possess all fulness of righteousness to give spotlessness to his sacrifice, and that he should possess all fulness of grace to bestow on the objects of mediation. Now, whatever was needful in a mediator dwelt in Christ. It pleased the Father that all fulness should not only once be, but should ever abide, should dwell in Him.

Then again our text teaches us that it was by the blood of Christ that peace was made. It was only by a sacrifice, and that a sacrifice of infinite value and spotless excellence, that peace could be made. Christ was the Revealer of the Father's justice as well as of His love, and He bore men's sins, making Himself a sacrifice, that God in His justice, having received a perfect atonement, might justify all believers. Christ, the head of the Church, died, and His body, the Church, united indissolubly with Him, died in and with Him. It is the fact of the Church's union with Christ that lies, if I may so speak, at the very root of the atonement. His death was her death, His sacrifice her sacrifice, His atonement her atonement. Hence, when He had offered His sacrifice, her peace was procured.

And mark the glorious result of the shedding

of the blood of Him in whom all fulness dwelt. By means of that blood all things were reconciled to the Father, or rather the Father reconciled all things to Himself. There are some who take our text as teaching simply that all things heavenly and earthly were mutually reconciled in God's sight and to God's glory. Earth was, they say, severed from heaven by sin. The links binding earth to heaven were broken, the very angels turned into ministers of wrath. But through the sacrifice of Christ harmony was restored to the universe, and earthly things long severed from heavenly were brought into union with them again. Now, all this is doubtless true, but it is not the leading, the great truth taught in our text. Our text really speaks specially of reconciliation to God, and declares that God reconciled all things whether on earth or in heaven to Himself. And the meaning of these words is that God, through Christ, reconciled men absolutely to Himself, bringing them out of their estrangement and their enmity ; and that when men had been reconciled absolutely even heavenly things were reconciled relatively, that is, heavenly beings were brought nearer to God. The wondrous power of Christ's sacrifice, revealing the fulness of the Father's love, brought poor erring men from estrangement to friendship, and touching the hearts of angels, to speak figuratively, led them to love God even more than they had loved Him before. Is it not easy to believe this ? When a man displays an act of forgiving love to a brother, it is

not that brother's heart only, but the hearts of many that he wins. And when God reconciled men to Himself, through Christ, was it not natural that He should bind the whole universe with closer bonds of love to Himself.

O ! brethren, was there such, is there such fulness dwelling in Christ, and will ye not partake of this fulness ? Is God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, and will ye not be reconciled to Him ? O ! come in your poverty, that ye may be made rich from Christ's unsearchable riches ; come, laying aside your enmity, and be reconciled to God. Come and accept Christ as your Head, and through His blood you will have peace, and in that glory which now crowns your Head you will at length fully share.

VII.

"And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in His sight: if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I, Paul, am made a minister." —Colossians i., 21-23.

THERE is, after the pursuit of virtue, nothing in which man can more worthily engage himself than the pursuit of truth. Even when the truth in whose pursuit he employs himself is not moral or spiritual truth, but simply truth about things seen, physical truth, as we may term it, he is well employed. The man who strives to attain to an accurate acquaintance with the facts of the world in which he dwells, who is carefully observant of the wondrous things that meet his eye and eager to learn by reading about things that cannot come under his personal observation, is assuredly using in a fitting way the powers which God has given him. The pursuit of knowledge about even the commonest things is a pursuit of a most worthy kind. And if it is fitting that a man should pursue what we may call physical truth, still more fitting is it that he

should pursue mental, moral and spiritual truth. It is true, indeed, that "much study is a weariness of the flesh," but the rewards of study compensate, and much more than compensate, for all such weariness. It is true, moreover, that "he that increaseth knowledge increases sorrow," true because the further he advances in knowledge the more is the sense of his ignorance forced upon him, and true also because any wide knowledge, of human life at any rate, must be a knowledge of much that is sad. But it is not sorrow alone that he that increaseth knowledge increaseth. Increase of knowledge often means increase of pure and innocent joy.

But with what end should truth be pursued? Or should she just be pursued for her own sake? For her own sake, doubtless, she is worth pursuing. Fashioned as man is, with his native curiosity, a curiosity keen and eager, it is only, as it were, conforming to the constitution of his nature when he pursues truth for truth's own sake. And even if much that he learned could have little visible practical bearing he would not on that account be acting wrongly in seeking to extend his knowledge. My opinion may be a very small matter, but it is my opinion, nay, my decided conviction, that truth is ever worth pursuing for its own sake. Yet, strongly as I cherish this conviction, I do not think that it should be pursued for its own sake alone. I hold that all our knowledge should be subservient to our moral and spiritual advancement, that we should pursue truth not simply for its own sake,

but for the sake of our fuller spiritual life. And specially should we pursue spiritual truth for spiritual ends. We should seek knowledge about divine things, not from mere curiosity, not from the mere desire for intellectual enlightenment, but from the higher and worthier desire to use our knowledge for our growth in grace. So was it that the Apostle Paul ever used his knowledge. He dealt with the deepest theological questions, he soared to the loftiest heights of speculation, but ever with the end of strengthening faith and elevating life in himself first and then in others. Have we not a striking example of this in the chapter from which our text is taken? There surely the Apostle is dealing with deep truths, searching into profound mysteries, inquiring, under the guidance of inspiration, into the very origin of all things and into the divine existence itself. And yet from all his lofty speculations he turns to matters of plain, practical import, brings these speculations to bear on the lives of those to whom he writes. He has shewn the glory of Christ's personality only that he may lead those to whom he writes to see in Him a perfect Saviour and to fix on Him an unwavering faith. It is our text which contains this application of doctrine to life, this utilizing of knowledge for spiritual ends. We have therefore to regard the doctrine of our Lord's divinity not so much in itself as in its bearing on the Christian life, in its affording of abundant consolation, in its stimulating of hearty faith.

I. Let us meditate, in the first place, on personal reconciliation to the Father through Christ.

To the Colossians St. Paul wrote, "And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death."

You will doubtless remember that in the last passage from this Epistle on which we meditated we had Christ presented to us as God's eternal and divine Son, incarnate in our nature, reconciling all things to God, whether things on earth or things in heaven, in other words, bringing back to God what had been astray from Him, and bringing nearer what had never wandered. We saw Christ, in other words, as the head of a new moral and spiritual creation, and bringing this whole new creation to the Father. The thought is a magnificent one, for it is the thought of the final vanquishing of evil, and the restoring of the moral order of the universe. Men's hearts may well grow sad at the contemplation of the evil around them and within them, of the wars, the discords, the hatreds, the sins of every kind that abound, of the alienation of men from God, of the moral disorder which they do see in part, but the extent of whose domain they cannot even dimly guess. Well, amid the sadness which the contemplation of evil and the thought of its long-continued and widely-extended sway must inspire, there comes for consolation the noble thought of the Apostle, the glorious assurance that the reign of evil will not be perpetual, the sublime

conception of the restitution of all things, that

“one far off, divine event,
To which the whole creation moves.”

—The Apostle speaks of evil as but a phase, however sad, of the history of the universe, as but a tempest, however terrible and however protracted, preceded by a calm that was from eternity and to be succeeded by a calm that will last through eternity. To him evil is the sorrow of the night that is to be succeeded by the joy of the morning, the evil dream that the sunshine of eternity is to chase away. And O! how consoling is this thought of his, this thought of the Son of God reconciling all things to His Father. And yet this thought, sublime, blessed, consoling, requires something to complete it, requires to be brought home, requires personal application. But this personal application the Apostle gives, “You . . . hath He reconciled.” It is doubtless a cheering thing to contemplate, even if it be in the dim distance, “the good time coming,” yet is it a more cheering thing to feel that for oneself the good time has actually begun. It is a blessed thing to be able to look down the years, it may be the centuries, and behold in hope all things reconciled to God; yet the vision, sublime as it is, is made all the clearer and all the more blessed if we can feel that the reconciliation is not all in the future, that it is a present reality and a reality for ourselves. And this is just what the Apostle declares it to be.

The reconciliation of believers to God is a

present reconciliation, "And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your minds by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death." Thus did St. Paul write to the Colossians, speaking of their reconciliation to God not as something lying far away in the future, but as something actually accomplished. These Colossians had not always been friends of God. On the contrary, they had been alienated from Him and under His just indignation. They had been idolaters, and not only idolaters but wicked men. That they were idolaters was perhaps the least of their offences. There is, it is true, much around man and within him to show him the vanity of worshipping the works of his own hands, yet even earnest seekers after God amid the heathen have found it a very hard task to break away from inherited ways of thinking, from all the associations of tribe and family, and to grasp the truth in its fulness. The heathen are to blame, no doubt, for their blindness, and yet from a human point of view, at any rate, their escape from that blindness, apart from guidance from without, is far from easy. And this is why I say that it was perhaps the least offence of the Colossians that they had been idolaters. Their great offence was that they had acted against the light which they had, and acting against it had lived wickedly. They had by their evil works shown themselves to be enemies of God, and drawn down His anger upon themselves. But this state of alienation had passed away. They had turned to God and been

reconciled to Him through Christ. Geologists tell us that the great river Rhone, which rises amid the glaciers of the Alps, once ran northwards through Europe, and, passing through lands that have long since become an ocean bed, poured its waters into a frozen, Arctic sea. Now its stream flows southwards and loses itself amid the sunny waters of the Mediterranean. So what had once, with the Colossians, been the chill stream of feeling flowing away from God had become the warm stream setting towards Him. The Colossians no longer were enemies to God, but His loving friends. When they had become the followers of Christ their estrangement from God had ceased. Even so, my brethren, whatever we may have been, however sadly we may have been alienated from God, the alienation ceases when we turn to Him in Christ. If we are believers we are even now reconciled.

Yet it is not so much on what we may call the human side of reconciliation as on its divine side that St. Paul dwells in the first part of our text. In other words he does not speak so much about our change of heart as about what Christ has done for us. "You . . . now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death." Experimentally our reconciliation to God takes place when we believe; potentially that reconciliation was effected when Christ died on the cross.

There are two supreme moments in our Lord's work of reconciliation. One lies in the future. It is that to which the Apostle Paul refers when he

says, “Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom of God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.” The other moment belongs to the past. It is the moment of Christ’s death on Calvary. The reconciliation of man to God was potentially accomplished when Christ died on the cross. For then in very truth was the full price of man’s salvation paid, then in one and the same person did divine love give to men the noblest gift that could be given, and humanity render to God a devotion in which nothing was lacking. Then did Christ, as Son of God, reveal the marvellous depth of the divine love for man, and, as Son of man, give God the utmost that could be given, even Himself. At the cross, assuredly, God and man were reconciled by Him Who to men was the incarnate Son of God, to God the perfect head and representative of humanity. In the body of His flesh, through death, Christ actually reconciled God and man.

What remains then for men to do is to appropriate personally the blessing that has been purchased, to recognise by faith their reconciliation to God in Christ. This St. Paul plainly teaches the Colossians, and through them teaches us, when he uses the words, “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled.” For although these words are probably linked most closely with those which just precede them, namely, “To present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight,” they cannot really be dissociated from the earlier

words, the words that speak of reconciliation made by Christ. Of course the reconciliation, as an act of Christ, was independent altogether of our faith, even as the act of indemnity which a sovereign may proclaim after a rebellion is independent altogether of the feelings which the rebellious may cherish towards their sovereign. But even as it is only by laying aside the attitude of rebellion that men can avail themselves of an act of indemnity, so is it only by coming to Christ in faith that men can avail themselves of His great work in their behalf and be reconciled to God. The great thought of our text is undoubtedly this, that not by angelic mediators but by Christ alone is reconciliation to God, and that this reconciliation is by the sacrifice of the cross. But yet it is of this reconciliation in its personal aspect that in great part the Apostle is speaking, and he distinctly associates personal reconciliation with faith. Let us but trust in Jesus, and we can say not merely that He died to reconcile men to God, but that through Him we are ourselves reconciled.

II. Let us now consider, in the second place, personal reconciliation in its completion, and the condition of this completion being attained.

In our text we are called to contemplate reconciliation to God in its origin, its progress and its completion. We have its origin in the death of Christ, its progress in the personal reconciliation of believers through faith in Christ, and its completion in the presenting of believers holy and unblameable

and unreproveable in God's sight. "To present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in His sight." But for the death of Christ reconciliation could not have been, but for faith the great work of Christ avails not for the individual, and, but for the final presenting of the believer in holiness before God, reconciliation would be incomplete.

The Saviour offered up Himself for us, then, the Apostle teaches, that He might in the end, might at His second coming, present us holy before God. Are we then to regard this presenting of us as holy before God as the acknowledging of us at last as righteous with the righteousness of Christ, or as the final bringing of us to a state of perfect personal holiness ? Both, I think, but mainly the latter. Believers will stand before God at judgment, even as they stand before Him now, justified through Christ's righteousness. But they will do more ; they will stand before Him conformed to the image of Christ, stand before Him free from all taint of sin, stand before Him with their whole natures holy and pure. It was sin that alienated man from God, but of that dire cause of alienation no trace shall remain. There remains no lingering trace of night when once the sun, full-orbed, has risen above the horizon ; there will remain no trace of the old, sad, earthly state when the heavenly state shall have fully come. When of old Christ moved about among men, multitudes of the sick came to be healed by Him, and as many as touched Him were made perfectly whole. Not otherwise deals He

with the soul's sore sickness. He will give perfect healing in the fulness of time. And it was to give men perfect deliverance from sin that He came to earth, that He suffered, that He died. Let us never forget this. We sometimes, I think, give undue prominence in our thoughts to justification, too little to sanctification. Doubtless, it is blessed to be justified, to be free from condemnation, to know that no day of wrath lies in the future for us. But is not sanctification, entire deliverance from the power of evil, perfect conformity to the image of Christ, unspeakably blessed, immeasurably to be desired? To wish to live is natural, but would not we wish to live with healthy frames, with vigorous life in every member? And should we not desire in like manner to live in perfect spiritual health, with spirits absolutely free from sinful infirmity, with full power and full readiness to do God's will? And if we should desire this, then nothing should gladden us more than to know that reconciliation in its fulness means nothing short of a perfect life hereafter.

How then, in so far as we are concerned, is this great end of our reconciliation to God to be attained? How shall we be at length presented holy and unblameable and unreprouable in our Saviour's sight? Simply by faith and hope, by faith which keeps a living hold on Christ, by hope which ministers to faith. "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which

is under heaven; whereof I, Paul, am made a minister."

It is by faith, as I have already said, that we make our own that reconciliation which Christ made by His death on the cross, and it is no less by faith that we press on to the consummation of Christ's reconciling work, our being presented holy and unblameable before God. The Christian life, the Apostle teaches, is emphatically the life of faith. In faith it begins, in faith it continues. We must believe to our justification, we must believe to our sanctification. I think we sometimes forget that we must believe to our sanctification. We understand that we must believe to be justified, we almost fancy we can sanctify ourselves. We look too much to our own struggles, our own endeavours. We should look to Christ. I do not mean, indeed, that we are not to struggle, that we are not to endeavour —very far from it, but I do mean that we are to look to Christ to finish His own work in us. It is His work and we should trust Him to accomplish it. Would we attain ultimate blessedness we must continue in faith, in faith strong and living. Our faith must not be like the flickering taper, ever nigh to extinction; like the feeble reed quivering with every gust. It must be strong, steadfast, enduring. "But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved."

And to our Christian faith Christian hope must minister. We must joyfully and thankfully anticipate the blessedness that is in store for all

that believe in Jesus, and in our anticipation of that blessedness trust all the more heartily in Him who alone can bring us to it. To every creature under heaven, to all mankind, that is, the same free offer is made, the offer of reconciliation to God and of life everlasting. For the realization of union with God, and in the hope of that life, let faith be fixed in the Saviour, and all for which Christ died will be accomplished in us.

O! my brethren, let us seek no other Gospel than that which was committed to the Apostles, that which St. Paul was appointed to preach. For it alone brings us the true glad tidings, the glad tidings of reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ. Let us cling to it, and to Him, to set Whom forth openly before us is its mission. Clinging to Christ we are reconciled to God even now and shall be His for ever.

VIII.

"Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church ; whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God."—Colossians i., 24-25.

THERE is nothing more natural for us than to enjoy the brightness and beauty of the spring. Winter may not indeed be wholly a trial to our patience, for even winter has its bright, bracing days, but its cold, its gloom, its chilling rains, its drifting snows make it in the main a season that we may endure, but cannot love. But we can and do love the spring. When the skies are azure above us, and the grass emerald beneath our feet, when we walk, not under bare and dripping boughs, but under arches of delicate green, when the lea is starred with primroses and the woods are gay with the anemone, when the lark mounts upward, making sweetest music as it soars, and from some unseen retreat the cuckoo utters its welcome note, he must have a sad heart indeed who can do other than rejoice. And even as it is natural to rejoice when one moves amid the beauty of spring, so is it natural

to rejoice when one is healthy and prosperous and free. One may not indeed wholly lose heart in the time of trouble, for even amid grave trials there may appear some mitigating circumstances, but we are only stating a fact of the commonest experience when we say that it is easy and natural to rejoice in health and freedom and prosperity.

But here in our text we have one speaking of rejoicing, not in comforts, but in afflictions. St. Paul has been led in the course of his letter to the Colossians to speak about himself, the mention of the Gospel having made it natural for him to say that the ministry of it had been committed to him, and, having once spoken of himself as a minister of the Gospel, he mentions, as he may well do, the trying circumstances amid which he is carrying on his ministry. He is no longer a free man, hastening on through Gentile regions to declare the good tidings of salvation ; he is a chained prisoner at Rome (Cæsarea ?), able only to converse with such as care to visit him and to communicate by letter with distant churches. For a man of his untiring energy such close confinement is suffering indeed. And yet there is no wail over his trials, no cry for sympathy, no eager expression of a wish that his woes may soon end. Instead of this there is the utterance of entire submission, nay, of pure and holy joy. "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you." I do not say that St. Paul would not have rejoiced in freedom, for as a free man he could have continued to proclaim the Word among the Gentiles,

whose debtor he ever felt himself to be, but, a prisoner, he was still able to rejoice, knowing that his very sufferings would tend to the Church's good. In suffering for its own sake no one can rejoice, but the true heart can rejoice even in suffering, if that suffering is likely to tend to some blessed result. And St. Paul so loved these Gentiles, of whom God had made him the Apostle, that for their sakes he was glad to suffer, knowing that through his sufferings their higher good would be secured. St. Paul had joyfully accepted his office of the Apostle of the Gentiles; he was ready for all the labours which the holding of such an office entailed on him; he was prepared to endure all the trials which might assail him amid his labours. Nor was he one who with mere dogged determination faced the difficulties of his task; he was joyful where it would have been but too easy to be sad. My brethren, I cannot contemplate, without profound admiration, this dauntless, self-forgetting saint. How seldom does the world see such men! How often it is that suffering chills enthusiasm. Here is one whose holy enthusiasm nothing can chill, one who welcomes even suffering itself, when by suffering he can minister to the well-being of his brethren.

In meditating on the noble words of this most loyal and faithful Apostle, let us consider, first, what he says about the work given him to do and, secondly, what he says about the sufferings which he had to endure in the carrying out of this work. In our text the sufferings are mentioned first, but it

will be simpler on the whole for us to consider first the work and then the sufferings.

I. Let us consider in the first place then what St. Paul says about the work given him to do.

His words are, “The Church, whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God, which is given to me for you, to fulfil the Word of God.”

He tells us in these words that he is the minister or servant of the Church, having been made of God himself a steward in His house, and having as the special service to which he is called, the special stewardship which he has to fulfil, the full declaration of the Word of God.

The Apostle regarded himself as the Church’s minister or servant. He arrogated to himself no proud pre-eminence, he claimed in no way to be a lord over God’s heritage. He had indeed a certain rule in the Church: he had to teach what the Church was to believe and to prescribe what it was to practise, but he made no high claims that the Church should do homage to him. Let the truth which he was sent to proclaim be heartily received, let the counsels which he was divinely directed to impart be faithfully followed, and he asked for himself no special consideration. There are rulers who are a nation’s best servants. I know that all rulers are not so. There are some that think only of themselves, that govern only in their own interest, that manifestly are convinced that the people exist for them and not they for the people. But there

are others that live for those whom they rule, that think continually how they may benefit them, that devote their time, their talents, their health to their service. And if St. Paul did indeed bear rule in the Church he bore it simply that he might serve the Church. In very truth he was the servant of the Church for Christ's sake. Of course every preacher of the Word calls himself the Church's servant, and as a rule the designation is accurate enough. But the Church has had few servants like St. Paul, for he served it with labours, with talents, with wearisome journeyings, amid peril, privation, stripes, imprisonments, until the hour when he closed his services by enduring martyrdom for its sake.

Into this service the Apostle had been called by God, and the fact that he had been so called always deeply impressed him. There are, we may honestly believe, few men that preach the Word who do not feel that they have been called to preach it. They have felt, they believe, a divine impulse moving them to give themselves to the work of the ministry ; they have been led by God's providential dealings with them to see that it seems to be in accordance with His will that they should give themselves to that work ; they have not been without tokens that their labours have been blessed. But St. Paul was not left to reason out the question whether he had or had not been specially summoned to serve the Church. His call came to him in the most direct and emphatic way from on high. The voice of the risen Saviour proclaimed to him that

he had to devote his life to the service of the Church ; the hand of God laid hold of him and guided him in the way wherein he had to go. Just as surely as the other Apostles, who heard Jesus speaking to them on earth, were divinely called to the ministry of the Church, was St. Paul divinely called to it. And this fact of the divine call he emphasises in our text. He tells us that a dispensation of God was given to him for the Gentiles. Now these words simply mean that God himself made the Apostle a steward in His house. Could the Apostle then be other than eager to fulfil his stewardship, when it had been committed to him in such a way ? Whatever a man's work may be he is surely likely to perform it best when he has the sense that it is the very work to which God has appointed him. And was it not natural then that St. Paul should be eager to fulfil the duties of that stewardship which God had committed to him in so striking a way ?

What then was the nature of that stewardship which God had committed to the Apostle ? that service in the Church to which He had called him ? Men may serve the Church in many ways, serve it in preaching, serve it in ruling, serve it in the instruction of the young, serve it in ministering to the sick, serve it with their talents and serve it with their means. In the time of war it is not the fighters alone who serve. They also serve who bring up the ammunition, who convey the supplies of food, who minister to the sick and wounded.

Even so not the preachers alone serve in the Church, but all do so who in any way help on her cause, or assist in the manifold work which she has to perform. What was St. Paul's service? Specially this, that he should preach the Word to the Gentiles. "According to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the Word of God." The expression, "to fulfil the Word of God," has been variously understood, but its true sense seems to be, "to preach fully the Gospel." And in this sense it is in close keeping with other utterances of the Apostle, such as that, "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel," and that other, "I am debtor both to the Greeks and the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are in Rome also."

St. Paul's special service then was to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, his stewardship was a stewardship of the Word. The work to which he was specially called, the work which he so eagerly embraced, the work in which he so heartily rejoiced, was no other than that of proclaiming fully to the Gentiles the glad tidings of salvation. My brethren, I wonder not that he should have rejoiced in this work. Is it not a work in which any might rejoice? There is always a feeling of sweet satisfaction in ministering to the wants and soothing the sorrows of others. But O! what a rare joy must there have been in going out into a dark world, a world without God and without hope, a world with no true

joy for the present and no blessed expectation for the future, and in telling that world of the love of the divine Father and the boundless grace of the Saviour? Who, after all, who, at least, with true love to man in his heart, would not have welcomed, even amid sorrow, privation and persecution the blessed work given the Apostle to do? "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation."

II. Let us now consider, in the second place, what St. Paul says about his sufferings.

His words are, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church, whereof I am made a minister."

Now, in connection with these words, we have very specially to note that the sufferings of which St. Paul here speaks are sufferings which came to him in close connection with his work. Had St. Paul not been a preacher of the Gospel, and specially had he not been the Apostle of the Gentiles, he would not have had to endure the sufferings which came upon him. Had he remained what he was at first he would have been free from persecution. No doubt very grave and terrible sufferings came upon the Jewish nation, but that was after the Apostle's martyrdom. In his days it was the Christian who was the hated and persecuted

man. It was when St. Paul became a Christian, and not only a Christian but a preacher, and, beyond a preacher, the Apostle of the Gentiles, that he had to set his face against the storm. Then unbelieving Jews and unconverted Gentiles became his constant assailants, while even Christian Jews looked somewhat coldly upon him, and some of them actually embittered his life by trying to mar the simple fulness of that Gospel which he had preached. All his persecutions were not indeed owing to the fact that he was the Apostle of the Gentiles, but the bitterest undoubtedly were so. And the imprisonment which he was enduring when he wrote his Epistle to the Colossians was beyond all doubt owing to his being so. It was his close association with Gentiles that led to the charge out of which his imprisonment sprang, that led to his being accused of having desecrated the temple. We cannot then separate the Apostle's sufferings from his work. That work, we may well say, turned the world against him. And as his work was amongst the Gentiles, and his sufferings sprang from his work, we may easily understand why he wrote to the Colossians as suffering for them. He was suffering for all Gentile Christians, and for them amongst the others.

How then did the Apostle regard these most bitter and protracted sufferings of his, these sufferings that were so inseparably associated with his work ? The work, we know, he rejoiced and delighted in ; did he regard the sufferings with other than fortitude

and resignation? To suffer with fortitude is but the part of any brave man, to suffer with resignation is becoming to the Christian. Did St. Paul do more than any brave man would have done, more than any Christian might naturally have been expected to do? Yes, he actually rejoiced in his sufferings. So well did he love his work, so well did he love those among whom his work had to be carried on, that he joyfully bore the sufferings which came in the course of duty. The clouds that ordinarily wear a sombre hue gleam with all glories of purple and gold in the light of the morning sun. So to St. Paul suffering, which in itself appears gloomy enough, was changed and even beautified by the cause for which it was borne.

It is meet, however, that we here ask if there was no reason, beyond the fact that suffering was in St. Paul's case inseparably associated with his work, for his rejoicing in it. We cannot have the roses without thorns, but we are willing to bear with the thorns for the roses' sake. Yet we can hardly be said to rejoice in the thorns. And St. Paul might have been ready to accept suffering as an unavoidable necessity without rejoicing in it. Why did he rejoice in it? Mainly because the very sufferings which he had to bear helped on his work. We know that suffering often in the end leads to the higher good of the individual, and that even while he is suffering the power of Christ may be manifested in sustaining and comforting him. Saints are often conformed to the Lord in suffering,

that at length they may be conformed to Him in glory. Nor was St. Paul ever forgetful that through the grace of Christ his sufferings might result in his ultimate spiritual good. In our text, however, he is thinking not of how his sufferings may be blessed to himself, but of how they may be blessed to the Church. "My sufferings for you." The Apostle was fully convinced that the sufferings of the Church's servants as well as their labours would be for her progress and upbuilding. If they, amid their persecutions, remained steadfast then would their steadfastness be for an example and encouragement to others, and then also would Christ be glorified, Whose grace had enabled them to endure. That men are willing to die for a cause may not indeed absolutely prove the cause a good one, but assuredly it proves that he who died for it believed in it. And it is ever a strengthening and stimulating thing to find men bravely holding to their convictions. Nor were the men of St. Paul's time likely to pay less heed to Christianity when they found that its supporters were willing to die rather than to be untrue to it. Nay more; surely men could not but feel how eager St. Paul and such as St. Paul were for their good when they found them braving all things to proclaim the Gospel to them. And although, as I have said, that men are willing to suffer for a cause does not necessarily prove that cause right, yet the wondrous steadfastness of persecuted Christians under their afflictions surely was fitted to show that they had something more to

sustain them than mere natural firmness, even divine grace. St. Paul saw all this, and therefore he rejoiced in his sufferings. Men might bind him, they could not bind the Word; they might put him to death, they would only advance the cause for which he suffered. Animated by fervent love to Christ, whose body the Church is, and eager to serve the Church itself, St. Paul hailed death itself, if by it his Master could be glorified among men, and men won to the faith or confirmed in it.

St. Paul regarded all the sufferings of Christ's servants for the Church or in the following out of the truth, as the sufferings of Christ Himself. Had not the Lord taught him to do so when He said to him on the way to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *Me*?" No doubt our Lord's personal sufferings were over, and had accomplished that which they were meant to accomplish, even the complete redemption of the Church. But although Christ has passed personally from all suffering He can still suffer in His members, His people on earth. So closely is He connected with them that their pains are His pains, their griefs His griefs, and specially so when they suffer for the truth. And whatever portion of the sufferings, the afflictions, of Christ remained behind for St. Paul, that he was willing to endure. There always remains something, there always is something behind, as the Apostle puts it, of Christ's afflictions to be endured. In other words, the Christian has to suffer even as his Master had to suffer, has to be

tried as his Master was tried, has by his sufferings to promote the good of others, even as by His sufferings his Master wrought out their salvation. And St. Paul was willing to bear what, as a member of Christ's body, fell to him to bear, willing for his own sake, willing for the Church's sake. Suffering for the Church's sake was in all truth the affliction of Christ. It was, as one might truly say, a partaking of the Master's lot, it was suffering for His body. Yes, the Apostle might say, the Lord suffers in me, and as He counts my suffering His He will use it for His own blessed ends. Well then may I rejoice in my sufferings.

My brethren, let us murmur in no way at what we may have to bear for our spiritual progress, least of all at what we may have to bear for Christ's and our brethren's sakes. Let us learn from him, who rejoiced in his sufferings, because these sufferings profited the Church. Even if doing good means hardship and sacrifice for us, let us still do joyfully what lies in our power, do it for the sake of the body of Christ, do it for His own dear sake.

IX.

“Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”—Colossians i., 26-27.

IN the ancient world, that heathen world to which the Gospel came, it was not deemed fitting that all religious observances should be open or all philosophic teaching public. There were religious rites, called mysteries, in which only certain persons who had been duly initiated could take part; and there were philosophic doctrines, termed esoteric, which were confided to an inner circle of disciples alone. It would seem that in the Church at Colossae there was a tendency to imitate the heathen world in having an inner circle of the initiated, if not perhaps much in the matter of ritual, at any rate in the matter of doctrine. Even in the matter of ritual there seems to have been an endeavour to represent certain practices and ceremonies as necessary to the higher Christian life, and by consequence to mark off such as observed these practices and ceremonies as a class spiritually superior to their brethren. We know how in after

ages monastic isolation, celibacy and ascetic practices came to be regarded as the distinguishing marks of the highest religious life. And it certainly seems that in Colossae there were those who desired to add to the apostolic counsels regarding Christian living counsels of their own, to follow which would be, they deemed, to attain a yet higher standard of religious life. Perhaps, however, they meant these counsels of theirs to be followed, not by a select number, but by all. But whether this was so or not, whether they meant or did not mean their will-worship for the many or the few, they assuredly laid claim to a special illumination in the matter of doctrine, and thus constituted themselves, and were likely enough to get others to regard them as constituting, an inner circle, deeply versed in what to the mass of believers were profound mysteries. "Beware," says the Apostle, "lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit," and again he speaks of some one "intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind." Speaking thus he surely indicates that there were those in the Colossian Church who laid claim to special illumination, who held themselves to be the repositories of a knowledge far deeper than it was usual for men to possess.

Now against this tendency to reproduce in the Church the profitless and indeed hurtful distinctions of heathenism St. Paul very strenuously contended. He would on no account tolerate the introduction of the rites and ceremonies and ostensibly religious

practices which some were seeking to introduce as the distinguishing features of a higher Christian life. He wanted, doubtless, the highest Christian life, but he wanted it for all, and not in the way of ceremonial observance and ascetic practice, but in the way of purity and charity and righteous action. And he was as little ready to tolerate the claims advanced by some to the possession of a special knowledge (*γνῶσις*) of things hidden from the mass of Christians as he was to tolerate assumptions of superior piety based on the ground of humanly instituted ceremonies and practices. He did indeed speak of mysteries, of things that had long lain hid in the secret counsels of God or that had been but dimly and partially revealed. And he also spoke of the limitations of human knowledge, of the dimness which characterizes men's vision of spiritual things. But he held that the limitations of human knowledge were universal, and that what mysteries were revealed were revealed to no special caste of the illuminated, but to the whole body of Christians. He speaks of a mystery in our text, a mystery that had been hid from ages and generations, but he declares that this mystery has been made manifest to the saints, had become in other words the property of the whole Church. And as St. Paul contended, so must it ever be held, that the heritage of profitable and saving truth belongs to the whole body of the saints, and that none can claim that they alone have a true and deep knowledge of spiritual things.

Let us now turn our attention to that great mystery which, in our text, St. Paul tells us has been made manifest to the saints, and the knowledge of which is the true and saving knowledge.

I. Let us consider, in the first place, the mystery of our text.

What that mystery is St. Paul himself very plainly tells us. "The mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." The mystery then is Christ himself, Christ in His glorious personality, Christ as the Saviour of the world, Christ, the hope of glory. Indeed, in the whole chapter of our text, St. Paul is unfolding the mystery of which he here speaks, disclosing the marvel of our Lord's personality, unveiling the secret of His love. When we have read and pondered the chapter we have the mystery opened. Of course, when I say that we have the mystery opened, I do not mean that we have all things pertaining to our Lord made absolutely clear to us, made perfectly level to our comprehension. We can grasp perfectly neither the nature nor the work of Christ. We cannot understand fully the tabernacling of the divine in the human, we cannot apprehend clearly the bearing of our guilt by the sinless Saviour. We must be content in many things to see through a glass darkly. But although we are not able to see to their very depths even those things that have been revealed to us, we need have no difficulty in knowing what St. Paul alludes to when he speaks of the mystery which hath been hid from ages and

generations, but now is made manifest to His saints. That, I say, he has told us at length in the chapter from which our text is taken.

(1) It is first the mystery of Christ's person. The thought of an incarnation, of a tabernacling of the divine in the human, is not a thought that has never, except under the teaching of Christianity, entered human breasts. Even in the Greek and Roman mythologies we find a certain crude expression given to such a thought, while under such religious systems as Brahminism and Buddhism a certain idea of incarnation is familiar enough. Yet under no religious system have we that clear, full, definite teaching regarding the tabernacling of the divine in the human, which we have under Christianity. The incarnation of which the New Testament Scriptures speak is a true and absolute indwelling of the divine in the human, the union of two distinct natures in one glorious person, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Yet how transcendent is this mystery which is unfolded in Scripture, how vainly would men, apart from divine inspiration, have sought to discover it for themselves. The more we examine what men, guided only by the light of reason, have thought and written regarding the dwelling of the divine in the human the more thoroughly shall we be convinced that no searching on man's part would have resulted in his finding of the glorious truth of the incarnation. For the unveiling of many mysteries man's reason has sufficed. Many things that entirely transcended

the comprehension of men of past ages are plain enough to us to-day. But this great mystery of the incarnation no deep and toilsome thinking on man's part would have sufficed to discover. No one was able to shew this mystery save one who, like St. Paul, was taught of the Spirit of God. That, however, which lay far beyond the reach of human wisdom, God's Spirit has revealed to men. We have been made acquainted with the mystery of the incarnation. We know that there hath appeared among men the true and only begotten Son of God, "Emmanuel, which is God with us." Little as we can comprehend the way in which in our Lord the divine and human meet, it has been revealed to us that they meet and most truly meet in Him. Amid human companions and in the vesture of our humanity He appeared, Who from all eternity was with God and was God.

(2) But the mystery of which St. Paul speaks in our text is not only the mystery of Christ's person, it is also the mystery of Christ's office.

"The mystery which is Christ in you." The words, "Christ in you," should rather be read, "Christ among you." It is quite true that Christ dwells not only *among* His people, but also *in* His people. So He often taught His disciples, notably so in the wondrous address on the eve of the Crucifixion. There is no believer in whom the Saviour does not dwell, and this indwelling is itself one of the deep yet glorious and blessed mysteries which have been unveiled to us. But the mystery

of our text is Christ among the Gentiles, Christ among men, Christ fulfilling His glorious office of Saviour of mankind. And this too was a mystery that needed a divine unveiling. It had not suggested itself to men, it would not have suggested itself to them, that the Son of God should come in the flesh as the world's Redeemer. No doubt a certain belief in the divine clemency and kindness was common enough even among the heathen themselves. Meagre and dim as were the conceptions of the Gentiles regarding the Godhead, there was not the absolute lack of a belief that from some supernatural source kindnesses came to men. But men who had not learned that there was but one God could surely know but dimly what divine beneficence meant. Even the Jew, with all his superior privileges, had but a narrow conception of it. What conception then could the Gentile have? My brethren, to us, who are heirs of well-nigh eighteen centuries of Christian teaching, the thought of the divine love going out towards a lost world seems, if a glorious, yet a most natural one. It is only Christianity that has made it so. That the Son of God should become incarnate for the salvation of mankind was a thought that would never have entered human minds had it not been suggested from on high. Well might St. Paul speak of Christ among men, in other words, of the Son of God as the Saviour of mankind, as a mystery. Not all the sages that ever thought of the deep problems of the universe would have thought of the coming of Christ in the flesh

for the salvation of men. That God should love the world was a thought beyond them, that He should so love it as to give His Son for its salvation far further beyond them still. The deep mystery has indeed been unveiled and we know it, but it had to be divinely unveiled for us. But amid all that has ever been revealed to man there has been revealed nothing so momentous, nothing so wondrous, nothing so glorious as this mystery of godliness. Think of it, my brethren. There were teachers in Colossae who professed to have wondrous and mysterious doctrines to unfold to those who craved for an illumination surpassing that ordinarily enjoyed. What had they to offer compared with the mystery which St. Paul had to reveal, the mystery of Christ's office as Redeemer, the mystery of the Son of God come to save that which was lost?

(3) Again the mystery of which St. Paul speaks in our text is the mystery of Christ as the hope of glory.

There is, of course, a close connection in thought between Christ as the Saviour and Christ as the hope of glory. Yet we may justly say that the thought of Christ as the hope of glory is the completion of that of Christ as the world's Saviour. The thought of salvation is the thought of present blessings as well as future, of deliverance from present evil and of partaking in present good as well as of deliverance from future evil and enjoyment of future good. It is meet then that a certain emphasis

should be given to salvation in its completion, to salvation as final triumph over evil and perfect enjoyment of good. And this emphasis is given in our text in the words, "Christ the hope of glory." Of those to whom St. Paul wrote the majority had grown up with no clear conception of a future life, with no living hope of future blessedness. To them the future was dark and mysterious indeed. But the mystery passed away with the revelation of Christ as the incarnate Son of God and the Saviour of the world. In His Resurrection men learned to hope for their own resurrection ; in His Ascension to the right hand of the Majesty on high they learned to hope for their own entrance into the place prepared by Him for them ; in their whole relation to Him as their Saviour they learned to hope for everlasting blessedness. Yet, how far would men have been from attaining a knowledge of this mystery, apart from the Christian revelation. Without it they would at the best have lived in dire uncertainty, in most cases they would have lived without hope. Yet, how dark so ever the future would have been to men without the Gospel, under the Gospel there is blessed light, and we are able to rejoice, not only in present divine pity and help and guidance, but also in sweet and cheering hope of future and everlasting glory.

II. We must now consider very briefly to whom, and for what end, the mystery of our text has been revealed.

St. Paul speaks of "the mystery which hath

been hid from ages and generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles."

The mystery, as I have been striving to explain, is Christ, the incarnate Son of God, the Saviour of men here and hereafter, and this mystery has been revealed under Christianity only, at least in the fullest sense of the words. It was a mystery hid from ages and generations, hid to a large extent even from the Jews, hid wholly, or almost wholly, from the Gentiles.

It was a mystery hid to a large extent even from the Jews. No doubt in the prophetic Scriptures the coming of Christ was foretold, and no doubt also it was said concerning Him, He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. But so little did multitudes of the Jews understand their own Scriptures that they looked for a temporal deliverer and not for a spiritual Saviour, and that they did not think He was in any true sense to be a Saviour to the Gentiles at all. Even from the Jews then the mystery of Christ, the Saviour of the world, was hidden, partly we may own by the comparative dimness of prophecy and still more by their own inability to walk in the light which they had. From the Gentiles that mystery was practically hidden altogether. Yet, after the longest and dreariest winter comes the sweet spring-tide, after the gloomiest night the dawn, and the mystery which had been hidden from ages and generations

was at last made manifest. Christ came. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among men, and God's high purpose of saving men was clearly revealed. Why the darkness lasted so long, why the mystery was hidden from ages and generations it would be vain to inquire. Doubtless, in all His dealings with men, God has been working out His own purposes of love, yet we are unable to say why He has acted or forborne to act in a certain way. This only we do know, that in the fulness of His time it pleased God to make known the mystery of Christ. And to whom was this mystery made known? Not to a few favoured and chosen individuals, not to a select class specially segregated from other men, but to that world which Christ came to save. Saving truth, and that is practically the mystery of our text, is for mankind. St. Paul undoubtedly speaks of the mystery as made manifest to the saints, inasmuch as it is only as men believe that they profit by the manifestation of the mystery. But He really makes no limitation as to those to whom the mystery may be made manifest. It is—the mystery is—an open secret to all who will believe. For the whole Church of God there is the same revelation, "Christ among men, the hope of glory."

To what end then has the mystery of Christ been made manifest? St. Paul answers this question in the words, "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery." God has made His great revelation to men that they

may know the riches of that glory which Christ has purchased for them. He would have them to know, and that not with a barren intellectual knowledge, but in a rich practical experience, the riches, the full and overflowing wealth, of the glory which is offered to men in Christ. He would have them to know experimentally what blessedness men can have here, to know in anticipation what blessedness they will have hereafter in receiving Christ. St. Paul's words in our text may not be easy to interpret with rigid grammatical accuracy, but their meaning still is plain. God has sent forth His Gospel into the world that men may know true blessedness in Him of whom that Gospel bears witness. O! let us to whom the mystery of the incarnation has been made manifest, who know that the Son of God has come in the flesh to save men, loyally receive Him that He may be the hope of glory to us, rejoicing in the thought that to know Him is the most blessed knowledge, for it is eternal life.

X.

“Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom ; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus : whereunto I also labour, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily.”—Colossians i., 28-29.

A GREAT society can only be kept together by some great common interest or some great idea that has laid powerful hold of the minds of its members. Men cannot be kept in anything like a true brotherhood unless by some strong bond of feeling. Mere organization is not enough. Formal terms of union may be arranged, rules and regulations for the conduct of the society may be drawn out with strict care, but no real union will be attained unless there is something that really draws heart to heart. Without that there is not organic unity as of the living tree where every branch and twig shares in a common life, but mere mechanical arrangement as of a mass of dry branches brought together. Force may indeed at times keep men in seeming union while there is no real spirit of harmony among them. but the moment the constraining force is withdrawn their union ceases. It is vain, I say, to hope to form and maintain a great society or brotherhood

unless by something that appeals powerfully to men's imagination or feelings or interests. This is true always and everywhere, true therefore regarding the divine society, the Church. Mere organization, mere arrangements regarding ritual and doctrine and government, could never have brought together and could never have kept together a great spiritual society. Organization of course has its place in the Church as in all societies, but it could not have made or preserved the Church. Men had to be fired by a common enthusiasm, stirred by common hopes, animated by common devotion to a great head, ere the Church could be and grow. Well did St. Paul understand this, and therefore in all his labours to form a divine society, and in all his labours to maintain that society among the Gentiles, he strove to awaken in men a common devotion to one who could be to them Saviour, pattern and guide, even to our Lord Jesus Christ. "Christ, whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man."

Now, if for the formation and maintenance of a society it is needful that men's hearts should be stirred by some common feeling, impressed with some common great idea, or actuated by some common powerful interest, it is quite plain that anything which tends to distract their attention from that feeling or idea or interest tends to the lessening of the social bond. And this again is true in the Church as elsewhere. And because it is true, and St. Paul knew it to be true, therefore did he

resist those teachers who craved for special attention to their own peculiar fancies, and in the very craving for that sought to turn men's attention away from Christ. Were such men to prevail the unity of the Church would be lost, and instead of one great body, united in faith, in love, in devotion to one living God, there would be a multitude of petty philosophic or theological schools, each fighting for its own peculiar tenets. St. Paul was no conceited, self-sufficient dogmatist, intolerant of any views save his own, but he was the champion of the unity of the Church, and he knew that it was only as men's minds were filled with Christ that the Church could be one. This was why he so vigorously contended against all that sought to distract men's attention from what should hold in it the first and commanding place. But even apart from his desire to preserve the unity of the Church, he knew that it was only by the preaching of Christ that society could be regenerated and men saved.

We have to meditate, then, on the great theme of all true preaching, on the persons to whom, the way in which, and the object with which this theme is set forth, and on the power which inspires every true preacher and enables him to deal faithfully with his great theme.

I. Let us consider, in the first place, the theme of all true preaching.

The theme of all true preaching is Christ. "Christ, Whom we preach."

Does it seem to some that, if it is only Christ

that ministers of the Gospel are to preach, there must be much sameness and not a little narrowness in their preaching? Does it even seem as if there must eventually be a measure of formality in it from the too constant dealing with the same theme? Even the most excellent form of words, used at first with not a little earnestness, may, when repeated time after time, degenerate into a form and nothing but a form. And the constant repetition of even such words as "the blood of Christ" and "coming to Christ" and "justification by faith in Christ," grave words as they are, may end by stripping such words of all real meaning and force.

Well, I grant that there is something in these objections. I grant that if one dwells constantly on only one aspect of our Lord's life or His work his preaching will be narrow, and even have a tendency to become formal. Yet even this does not always hold. There are good men whose preaching is narrow in the sense that its themes are few, but which, though in that sense narrow, is yet fervent and earnest and powerful, more fervent, more earnest, more powerful than that of some whose range of topics is yet far wider. Still, it is not well to tarry too long over one part only of even a great theme, nor wise to risk the danger of sinking into a dreary formality.

But, brethren, what reason is there that the preaching of Christ should ever be characterized by sameness or narrowness or formality? The preaching of some of us who are in the ministry

may be characterized by these, but there is no reason in the nature of things why it should be so. For in reality in preaching Christ we are dealing with an inexhaustible theme, and one capable of giving ever fresh inspiration. Since the very dawn of literature the themes of poets have been in a large measure the same. Poets have sung of the beauty of earth and sky, of human graces of form and feature, of love and strife, of heroism and glory. Yet their productions have not been marked by sameness. Great poets have made the old themes seem new, singers of less sweetness and skill have yet been able to endow them with wondrous freshness. Why? Just because they are dealing with things of perennial interest, and things regarding which the last word can scarcely, by any possibility, be sung or spoken. He who sings of the beauty of Nature deals with a theme that is practically inexhaustible, and so does he who sings of the marvellous play of human passions. Have the poets, then, after all these ages, found something new to say about the beauty of Nature, and about the passions which sway human breasts, and must preachers, whose office it is to preach Christ, find that they cannot be other than narrow and formal? Tell me, my brethren, if there is any theme so inexhaustible or so inspiring as that on which the faithful minister is called to preach. He is called to preach Christ, and, in being called to do so, he is called to preach to men in relation to their dearest interests, and to preach to them of One who is at

once Saviour, Teacher, Friend and Guide. To preach Christ is to deal, as St. Paul deals in the present chapter, with the mystery of the incarnation, to declare the pre-existent glory and the earthly humiliation of our Lord. To preach Christ is to unfold the great mystery of the atonement, of the divine love that yearned for the salvation of a fallen and guilty world, of the great divine sacrifice made for the taking away of men's sins. To preach Christ is to declare the glorious truths of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, to shew how death has been abolished and life and immortality brought to light. To preach Christ is to tell of a divine presence that abides continually in and with the Church, of One that is with His people alway, to the end of the world. To preach Christ is to proclaim a divine and yet most human sympathy with human sorrow and temptation, to tell of One Who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. To preach Christ is to set forth the great guiding principles by which all lives should be moulded, and to point men to the perfect example in whose footsteps they should walk. To preach Christ is to tell men how our social disorders may be healed, how our fallen world may be restored.

If this is to preach Christ, how vainly they speak who would tell us that he who would only preach Christ must be content to be narrow and formal. He who would preach Christ truly may rather deplore the limitation of his own powers

which renders him unable to deal adequately with a theme at once so varied and so glorious. But to preach Christ truly is to preach on a theme so wondrous that even at the best one can but handle it in a way imperfect and fragmentary, and on a theme whose interest to the individual, to society, to the world should ever be of the deepest kind.

It is Christ then, Christ as Saviour, Teacher, Guide, Friend, the risen and living Christ, Who alone can heal the disorders of society and deliver and glorify the individual, that every faithful minister must preach. To do other than this is to be but an unfaithful steward of the mysteries of God. To do other is to fail to labour truly for the building up of that glorious unity, the Church, and to strive faithfully for the salvation of the individual.

II. Let us now consider the persons to whom, the way in which, and the object wherewith, the great theme of our text is to be set forth.

Christ only is to be preached and He is to be preached to every man. "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man." I have spoken in previous discourses of the desire on the part of some at Colossae to form an inner circle of the initiated to whom should be imparted instruction in knowledge too profound for the mass of ordinary believers. St. Paul would hear of no such proceeding in the Christian Church. He in no way regarded the kind of instruction which was to be imparted, and he favoured no exclusiveness among Christians. In his esteem there was nothing

that men could teach at all comparable to the great truths of Christ, and as these concerned every man he would have every man taught them. And these truths should indeed be taught to every man. This indeed the Church has on the whole realized with sufficient clearness. It may be, however, that individual preachers do not always realize it thoroughly, but that some preach rather to sections of their congregations than to all, and that many individual Christians do not realize it, but deem that there are whole races of men which are scarcely fit to receive the Gospel. What every minister should realize is that as far as in him lies he should preach to every member of his congregation, bringing the blessed and glorious Saviour clearly before all, and what every Christian should recognise is that Christ is the Saviour of mankind, and that He should be preached to every man. The full Gospel for all men, that is the Pauline conception of preaching, and surely all will agree with St. Paul who believe in the dignity of Christ's person and the grandeur of His work for men. All will agree with him too who believe in the spiritual unity of Christians, in one great society kept in living union by a common faith and devotion.

But if Christ is to be preached to every man, how is He to be preached? This too St. Paul teaches us when he says, "Warning every man, and teaching every man." We may justly enough say, I think, that in all true preaching there must be warning, must be the calling of men to repentance,

must be the reminding of them that they cannot escape if they neglect so great a salvation. I think that there is nothing that shows so clearly what a dire and deadly thing sin is as this, that to make a due atonement for it Christ had to die. Surely then there can be no true preaching of Christ where men are not warned, where they are not forcibly reminded of their sinful state, where they have not it clearly brought before them that the wages of sin is death. My brethren, even now would I warn you, even now remind you that we are all sinners needing salvation, even now call you to a true and heartfelt repentance. Yet he that would preach Christ truly must do more than warn every man, he must also teach every man. He must put clearly before men the remedy for their spiritual malady, must point them to the Great Physician, must plainly declare to them the way of salvation. Nor must he rest contented with this. He must set Christ before them as their perfect example of holiness and charity, as their deliverer from sin, as their hope of glory; in fact, he must seek to set before them the whole counsel of God. For the careless he must ever have a word of warning, for the doubting a word of confirmation, for the down-cast a word of comfort, for the wavering a word of cheer, for the believing a word of encouragement in the faith, for all men such a word as will put Christ more clearly before them. He must leave nothing unsaid that will tend to draw men to Christ and to keep them near to Him.

What then is the object wherewith Christ is thus to be preached to every man? It is that every man may be presented perfect in Christ. It is, as I have said, that there may be one divine society, but specially that in this society every man may reach perfection. If we are to have, not many Christian societies, but one great Christian society; if we are to have, not a kind of hidden doctrine for the few in each Christian congregation, but the same unfolding of the great Gospel mystery for all; if we are to have, in other words, Christ fully proclaimed to all men, it is that one great end may be accomplished in all, it is that all may at length reach spiritual perfection. We do not say that all will reach it, but the object of all true preaching everywhere has been, and is, that they may reach it. Why is the Gospel preached, it is asked; and the answer often given is, that souls may be saved. A true answer doubtless, if due account is taken of what is meant by salvation, but not a true answer if by being saved is meant simply the escaping of the due punishment of sin. It is much when a national rebellion is quelled without dire measures involving war and bloodshed, and without stern vengeance being taken on the rebels, but the nation never reaches a sound condition until the spirit of rebellion itself passes away and loyalty takes its place. And it is much, very much, when rebellious sinners are forgiven, but all is not as it should be until their wills are perfectly in accord with the divine will. Salvation is, in its true

meaning, perfect deliverance from moral and spiritual evil, and perfect renewal in the image of God. And it is that salvation in this full sense may be obtained that the Gospel is preached. To men that are by nature sinful, to men weak, imperfect, erring, the Gospel is preached, that in the end they may be presented perfect in Christ, that with all trace of evil gone, with all imperfection removed, they may appear before Christ bearing His own glorious image. Men loving their kind have striven to promote freedom, peace, social amelioration ; but while under the Gospel all these things are considered, these are not its only, its highest aims. It is that men may grow in grace and, growing, at last become perfect and perfect for ever, that the blessed Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached to men, that Christ himself is preached.

III. Let us now consider, in the last place, what is the power which inspires every true preacher and enables him to deal faithfully with his great theme.

It is just the power of Christ himself. “Whereunto I also labour, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily.”

We must not take these words as boastful words, words in which St. Paul glorifies himself. They are not even words in which he claims great visible success in his ministry. Such success he undoubtedly had, but he never speaks boastingly about it. “I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.” Thus it is that he speaks

about the fruits which visibly followed his preaching. Nor does he speak in any other spirit here. He is not describing himself as a mighty worker or as a successful worker, but as one whom Christ's power incited to his work and sustained in his work. We may indeed freely grant that he claims to be earnest in his work—the man who cannot claim to be that has no title to preach at all; we may indeed grant further that he claims to be not only in earnest, but passionately in earnest. He labours, he says, and in his labour he strives or rather agonizes. He feels consumed by his zeal for men's salvation, he can let no obstacle overcome his zeal for souls. Yet, passionately in earnest as he claims to be, he attributes all power that he has to Christ dwelling in him and working with power in him. Was he in earnest? Christ had inflamed and sustained his zeal. Did he struggle against every kind of difficulty to do his work? It was Christ that sustained him. Had he the power of imparting truth to others? It was Christ that had enlightened himself and conferred that power upon him. Was he instrumental in winning men to the Saviour? It was only Christ's own gracious aids that made him so. Yet the power of Christ did work in him, and as it wrought in him so will it work in every man that seeks to be faithful in proclaiming the Gospel. Surely it is not difficult to believe that? If our Lord so loved men as to give Himself for them, is it too great a demand on our faith to ask us to believe that He will strengthen and guide those who

seek faithfully to tell men of His love to them, His death for their deliverance? Surely no. The power that worked in St. Paul works still, works in the humblest faithful messenger of the cross. And surely it cannot work in vain. I own that we are sometimes staggered by the seeming small results of preaching—even of the most faithful preaching. Yet let us be assured that no true preaching, no honest preaching of Christ can be resultless. The power of Christ does enable men to be faithful in their message, and turns that message to good account. Let us not be despondent then as to the results of the preaching of Christ. And for ourselves, let us see that we really rest on and receive as our Saviour Him whom all faithful preachers proclaim, and that we seek for ourselves that spiritual perfection, to guide men to which is the great end for which the Gospel is preached to them.

XI.

“For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh: that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.”—Colossians ii., 1-4.

I BELIEVE there is no certainty that the Apostle had ever visited Colossae. Indeed the probability is the other way. The Apostle had friends both in Colossae and in the neighbouring city of Laodicea, but from the way in which, in our text, he couples the Christians of these cities with those that had not seen his face in the flesh, we are almost forced to the conclusion that he had not visited the cities themselves. Perhaps we are inferring too much from the words of St. Paul, and we may be content to leave the matter undecided.

Whether, however, St. Paul had or had not visited Colossae, it is certain that the interests of the Christians there engaged his loving and prayerful attention. Indeed he was not a man who required to be familiar with people in order to be

interested in them. As we can see very well when men are asked to interest themselves in foreign missions, for example, there are many people to whom the needs of the stranger appeal in vain, but St. Paul was not after the fashion of these people. He assuredly had the enthusiasm of humanity. As his own words show us, he was deeply stirred in his soul even for as many as had not seen his face in the flesh. Even then, if, as seems to be the case, he had never visited the Colossian Christians, his not having visited them could have made no serious difference in the way in which he regarded them. Known personally, or not so known, to him, they would still have had a warm interest in his prayers. And such an interest, whatever we may think about the probability of his having visited them, we know they had.

St. Paul was deeply moved by anxiety for the Colossians and Laodiceans and even for multitudes of people that were entire strangers to him. He tells us in our text of his great conflict, his intense and eager striving in prayer in their behalf. "I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you." What a revelation do these words give us as to what our prayers for others should be! What a rebuke do they convey to us for our too frequent coldness and formality in the supplications which we do make, nay, our too great forgetfulness to make any supplication whatever, in behalf of others! We forget to pray for others, or our prayers are formal and cold. Our whole interest is absorbed in

our own needs. Now I do not say that we ought not to pray for ourselves; we have need to pray much and earnestly in our own behalf. But I do say that we ought to pray for others much oftener and much more earnestly than we do. Think of St. Paul in his great spiritual conflict. When he wrote our Epistle he was a prisoner, under appeal to the Roman Emperor, and knowing not at all what the issue of his appeal would be. Under these circumstances were his anxieties all self-centred? Very far from it. Instead of his conflict in prayer being simply in his own behalf, it was in behalf of Christian brethren, known and unknown. In his own deep personal distress he thought constantly of others, struggled and strove in prayer for others. And as thus St. Paul strove in prayer for friends and strangers so should we.

What was the cause of St. Paul's deep anxiety for the Christians of Colossae? It was lest they should be in any way led astray from Christian love and Christian faith. He was eager that they should be comforted or confirmed, yet was there danger that they should be beguiled instead. And, knowing their danger, knowing that some one was seeking to beguile them by enticing words, he strove in prayer incessantly on their behalf. Let our thoughts be of what St. Paul sought for the Colossian Christians, that we may all the more clearly see what we should seek for ourselves and others.

The Apostle prays that the Colossian Christians may be comforted or confirmed, and that in order

to their being so, or as the actual manifestation of their being so, they may be knit together in love and may possess all riches of the full assurance of understanding. His prayer is, in effect, a prayer that they may continue fervent in love and firm in faith, which there was some danger that they might not do.

I. We note first that St. Paul prays for the Colossian Christians that they may be comforted.

“That their hearts might be comforted.” Some read the clause, “That their hearts might be confirmed.” Probably the ideas of both comfort and confirmation are suggested to us in the clause; they are indeed quite kindred ideas, and we may fitly enough turn our attention to them both.

Prayer then was made by the Apostle that the hearts of the Christians in Colossae might be comforted. There was much fitness in such a prayer. If unsettling teaching was to prevail in the Colossian Church, if men were to be taught that the Gospel of salvation which had been preached to them was inadequate, then their minds would be unsettled and their comfort would depart. But indeed, my brethren, the prayer for comfort of heart is a very fitting prayer for any one to offer, whether in behalf of himself or others. We all need to have our hearts comforted. I am not one of those who believe that men need a great deal of luxury and many possessions to make life worth the living. I am indeed convinced that, while it is possible to use even great wealth wisely, for the most of mankind it is best to have the world’s endowments in a

moderate measure. I esteem that man to be in a happy and desirable wordly condition, whose tastes are simple, whose desires are moderate, whose strength is adequate for his daily toils, and whose labours bring him what meets the needs of himself and his household. Let one have health and quiet in his home, and a sufficient, if still very moderate, supply of life's necessities, and he may well be content. But, while for our real good no vast store of this world's possessions is needed, there assuredly is need of comfort of heart. With hearts disturbed and distracted, life is deprived of blessedness for us. When we are void of inward comfort we can neither enjoy aright our temporal mercies nor bear patiently the hard things that come upon us. Natural, most natural, then, is it to pray that we and others may have comfort of heart, and comfort of heart not only when all things go well with us, but also when many things go or seem to go against us. Such comfort of heart can only come to us from a divine source, but from that source it can come and does come. Fitly then may we pray that from this source it may come to us and others, that, be the distractions of life what they may, we still may have inward peace.

But, I think, St. Paul's prayer was that the hearts of the Christians in Colossae might be confirmed as well as comforted. There was a danger lest these Christians should be beguiled with enticing words, lest in some measure they should be led away from Christ. It was meet then that

the Apostle should pray for their confirmation, for their firm abiding in that spiritual condition which they had reached. But it is very meet for us all to pray that we and others may have our hearts confirmed, that we may not be restless and unstable, torn by intellectual doubts and wavering in spiritual uncertainty. It is always a good thing for a man to know his own mind, and surely above all a good thing for him to know it in regard to spiritual matters. And in a special manner in the present day, when the minds of so many are unsettled about all things pertaining to religion, there is fitness in the prayer that in all these things our hearts may be confirmed. Assuredly, without being confirmed, they cannot well be comforted.

II. We now note, in the second place, that St. Paul prays for the Colossian Christians that they may be knit together in love.

“Being knit together in love.”

He sees in the knitting together in love, I fancy, at once a manifestation of their confirmation and a help to their comfort. Do we read the preceding clause, “That your hearts may be confirmed,” then may we esteem the words, “Being knit together in love,” as shewing that there is no better sign of genuine confirmation than love. Do we read the clause, “That your hearts may be comforted,” then must we esteem the words, “Being knit together in love,” as pointing to a sure way of attaining comfort. My brethren, there is little confirmation and there is little comfort where

love is lacking. Where men give themselves to rivalries and disputings they give but little token that saving truth has taken a firm hold of their hearts, and are little likely to find much spiritual consolation. St. Paul, as I have said, dreaded the coming in of false doctrine to the Colossian Church, and all the lamentable division and loss of spiritual peace which the coming in of such doctrine would entail. He had the example of the Corinthian Church before him, he knew what miserable divisions had occurred there, he knew how the faith of some had been shaken amid these divisions. And he was eager that the Church in Colossae might be spared the experiences of the Church in Corinth. He prayed therefore, and very fitly prayed, that the Colossian Christians might be knit together in love, that they might not be rent into parties through men and pernicious teaching, but rather that, being united, they might together oppose the incoming of error, and also that, being united, they might the more conduce to each others' comfort. Now, even as St. Paul prayed for the Colossian Christians that they might be knit together in love, so should we pray that we may be knit together in love. What need there is for such a prayer? How sadly does disunion prevail in the Christian Church, so sadly that the very name of Church Universal almost appears a mockery! Have we a Christian Church or is it but a mere congeries of conflicting sects that we have? The pulpits of one denomination are shut against the ministers of

another, stupid ecclesiastical jealousies are regarded as sacred principles; men are divided from each other by what should unite all, their religion—alas! And if sect disputes with sect, each sect has its own internal divisions, its wretched parties which are never weary of maligning each other. Nay, not seldom even in congregations divisions occur, and brotherly love does not always continue even among those who approach the mercy-seat together. What is the consequence of all this? Surely enough that hearts are neither confirmed nor comforted. Amid so much conflict many come to doubt if saving truth can be found, and many, seeking spiritual comfort, seek it in vain. O! surely there is room for conflict like the conflict of St. Paul, for strivings at the throne of grace that we may be knit together in love, that the spirit of charity, long exiled from the Church, may return as a welcome and abiding guest, that in every congregation men may live together as brethren. So, living in love, shall we put an end to the age of doubt and distress, shall we help each others' faith and minister to each others' spiritual joy. Our hearts will be confirmed and comforted, when we are knit together in love.

III. We now note, in the third place, that St. Paul prays for the Colossian Christians that they may come unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, even to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God—in other words, prays for the confirmation of their faith.

If they were to be confirmed or comforted in heart they must have a clear knowledge of some saving truth, and the knowledge that would really confirm or comfort them was the knowledge of the mystery of God, was the knowledge of Christ in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

There had risen up in, or had come to, Colossae some teacher or teachers who professed to be able to instruct the Christian converts there in some new “wisdom.” St. Paul knew very well that what the Colossians needed was not some specious human philosophy, but a revelation of the wisdom and love of God. The best knowledge that could be imparted to them was the knowledge that had been imparted to them when the Gospel had been proclaimed to them, and the desire of St. Paul was that they might ever advance more and more in this knowledge. The wisdom which the new teacher or teachers professed to be able to impart was a wisdom likely to beguile them and draw them away from Christ. St. Paul wished them only to draw nearer to and learn more of Christ, in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He wished, in fact, that the Colossian Christians should be confirmed and comforted by their ever deepening personal knowledge of Jesus Christ.

My brethren, how well may we join in the Apostle’s prayer, how eagerly may we seek for ourselves and others all riches of the full assurance

of understanding—in other words, all confirming and comforting knowledge of divine truth! We live in an age when the desire for knowledge has become, on the part of many, not a desire merely but an absolute passion, when there is no field of knowledge unexplored, when all Nature is ransacked, when the very secret of creation itself is one that men are fain to discover. Nor do I in any way find fault with this eager thirst for knowledge. One may indeed take exception to the framing of crude theories in place of the patient investigation of facts, but to the patient investigation of facts, characteristic of so many in our time, surely no one can object. Yet no knowledge at which men can aim, no knowledge of the natural world, no knowledge of history, no knowledge of human institutions and customs, no literary knowledge, can compare with the knowledge of the things of God, of the things that pertain to salvation. It is for this knowledge that we should pray, it is after it that we should strive.

Yet, is this knowledge not to be sought simply as an additional intellectual equipment. It is possible to attain to an intellectual knowledge of divine things and yet to have no true spiritual knowledge of them. One can know the teaching of the Bible without believing it, can know it without laying it to heart; but surely a knowledge of spiritual things that led to no increase of faith and no deepening of spiritual life was not what the Apostle Paul contemplated when he prayed that the converts

in Colossae might attain all riches of full assurance of understanding. He desired men to know in order that they might be confirmed in their faith, and we should desire to know that we may be confirmed in ours. We should seek to know the divine mysteries, the things long hidden, yet brought to light in Christ, that knowing them we may have livelier faith and nobler lives. In spite of the long ages of Christian teaching many men, even in Christian lands and in Christian Churches, are very ignorant of divine things. We should care to know all that God has revealed regarding His relation to us, regarding duty and destiny, regarding salvation here and hereafter. There should be no ignorance where God has made plain His will that men should know. But fuller knowledge of divine things should always mean deepened spiritual life, should always mean comfort and confirmation. Let us then seek not merely wider knowledge of the things of God, but also a faith enriched by all our knowledge.

But what, after all, is the true knowledge of the mystery of God? It is the living personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. St. Paul's words are, "To the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The simple meaning of these words is, "The full knowledge of the mystery of God, even Christ, in Whom are all the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge, hidden until they are brought to light in Him and by Him." We have no full knowledge of

divine things till we know them in Christ. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," and with no others. There rests a darkness on divine things until Christ makes them light to us. You know how uncertain all things are to the eye in the feeble and uncertain light of early dawn, or when masses of mist rest on the surface of the earth. The sun must rise, or being risen must scatter the vapours, before our vision can become clear. And Christ must give us His light ere we can have light indeed. We may in a way be learned in theology, we may know all that can be intellectually known about scriptural doctrine, we may be perfectly acquainted with the letter of Scripture, and yet have no true divine knowledge, for we never know aright the deep things of God, His love, His grace, His fatherly compassion, the wisdom and tenderness of all His ways with us, till we know Christ with a deep personal knowledge. But when we know Christ, know Him and not simply know *of* Him, know Him with our hearts as brother knows brother, know Him as Redeemer, Guide and Friend, then do we know all that is best to know, for we know the very way to the Father. No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." And when we do know Christ indeed, then are our hearts confirmed and comforted.

My brethren, you desire comfort and confirmation; you are eager for inward peace and stability. Seek these in a growing love to each

other and in a deeper personal knowledge of your Saviour. Seeking them thus you will not seek in vain.

XII.

"For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ."—Colossians ii., 5.

IT is not certain that the Apostle Paul had ever visited Colossae. The founding of the Church there he seems to ascribe to Epaphras, and he appears to number the Colossians as a whole with those who had not seen his face in the flesh. Although, however, St. Paul may not have been at Colossae, the Church there, in all probability, owed its origin to him, Epaphras appearing to have been one of his converts, and to have borne to Colossae the glad tidings which he had heard from the Apostle's lips at Ephesus. And certainly the Church at Colossae, many of the members of which doubtless knew the Apostle personally, regarded St. Paul with deep affection and looked on him as indirectly, at least, its founder. There was, at any rate, between St. Paul and the Colossians a connection sufficiently close to make it meet that he should write to them, giving them the counsels and admonitions which they required. We may esteem therefore the Epistle to the Colossians as practically

a letter from pastor to people, a letter revealing the true spirit which a pastor should breathe towards his flock, as well as showing what things in a flock are calculated to bring highest joy to a faithful pastor's heart. Now, in reading this Epistle, we find that St. Paul's feelings towards the Christians at Colossae, all of whom in a sense, and some of whom, such as Epaphras and Philemon, literally, he could esteem as his spiritual children, were feelings of the warmest affection; an affection that distance could not diminish nor changing circumstances change. And we find at the same time that nothing gave St. Paul a heartier joy than to hear from Colossae of the Church's spiritual prosperity, of the peace and harmony that subsisted among its members, of the purity of their lives and the stedfastness of their faith.

Therefore we would meditate first, on St. Paul's love to the Colossian Christians, and secondly, on the circumstances in the Colossian Church which filled his heart with joy.

I. We look, first, at St. Paul's love to the Colossian Christians.

This love of his to the Christians at Colossae was a love of no ordinary kind. It was a love cherished by one who was very far removed from those to whom it was cherished, and cherished amid circumstances that might well have led, not certainly to the extinction of love, but beyond all doubt to some interruption of its practical manifestation. A weak love dies when men are

separated from each other, when there is not the daily and familiar intercourse which will lead any well-disposed men to regard each other kindly. A weak love dies or well-nigh does so when he who has cherished it is placed in such circumstances as lead him to bestow much thought upon himself, circumstances of difficulty, pain and danger. It is only a strong love that endures through long separations, that is as deep after long years, during which friends have had to live apart, as it was on the day when they spoke their sad farewells. Such a love men have cherished for their native land, seeing perhaps more clearly the bare bleak hills, amid which they spent their youth, than the fairer scenes that surround them. Such a love men have cherished for their kindred, passing as it were in a dream through crowds of strangers, and seeing only the loved faces that were far away. It is only a strong love that leads one to think of, and to pray for, absent friends, and especially so when he himself is in the midst of gravest trials, and his own hardships tend to turn all his thoughts in upon himself. Strong then must St. Paul's love have been for the Colossians, for he loved them, thought constantly about them, prayed for them, when wide seas and lofty mountains separated him from them, and when he himself was a prisoner in Rome waiting to be tried before the cruel Nero, and knowing not what might be the issue of the trial. Far away from Colossae, and in bonds, the Apostle thought not about himself and his trials, but about

Epaphras and Philemon, about other Colossian friends who had visited him in Ephesus, and even about the many Colossians, who, although they had perhaps not seen his face, yet knew that he was the Apostle of the Gentiles and that but for him they would never have received the Gospel. It was then the strong love of an earnest true-hearted man that St. Paul cherished towards his spiritual children in Colossae. He could not have loved them more than he did, for neither absence nor personal affliction diminished his love to them.

And, my brethren, such a love as St. Paul bore towards the Christians of Colossae should all ministers bear towards their people. The tie which binds a minister to his congregation is no ordinary tie. Formed under the most solemn circumstances, and for the most solemn purposes, the relationship between minister and people is one of the closest and holiest kind. It is indeed a relationship akin to that which subsists between a father and his children ; for as it is a father's part to be the guide, the counsellor and the comforter of his children, so is it the pastor's part to be the guide, the counsellor and the comforter of his flock. If then the tie which binds minister to people is so close a tie, how deep should be the love dwelling in a minister's heart towards his congregation. Is he in a sense their father ? Then how warm should his affection be towards his spiritual children ! While he is with them he should perform all his duties towards them, not in a cold and perfunctory manner, but

with a loving zeal and a tender sympathy. He should sorrow with them in their sorrows, and be glad in their prosperity: he should speak to them in the house of prayer and in their homes with that kindly warmth which love alone can inspire. And should circumstances sever him from them, the breaking of the visible bond between him and them should not lead to his cherishing of a less warm love to them—*should* not, I say, and *need* not. To some men there is granted the peculiar and blessed privilege of labouring in one field during the whole course of their ministry; but most ministers, during at least the earlier years of their pastorate, have to endure the keen pain of parting once and again from those they have learned to love. But no man should forget the flock which he has left behind him: no man needs to forget it. St. Paul had very often to change the field of his labours, but he never forgot any field wherein he had laboured. And no true pastor will forget, no true pastor can forget, the people to whom he has once ministered, let the interval of space that severs him from them be ever so wide, let the interval of time from the period of his labours among them be ever so long. Absent in the flesh he yet will be with them in the spirit: his prayers for them will go up as of old: the story of their prosperity will continue to gladden him: the tidings of their sorrows will not fail to touch his heart. How often do we all live over again in thought our early days: how often do old scenes stand out before us undimmed by the mists of

years: how often do we seem to catch once more in all their distinctness the sound of once familiar voices! And often thus, my brethren, the minister lives again in thought amid the people to whom it once was his lot to minister. He may be far from them in body, he may even have sorrows and cares pressing upon him: but even his cares do not make him forget them, and he is ever near them in heart. The sailor father on the rough ocean or in the distant haven forgets not the children at home: and the true minister cannot forget those who used to look to him as their spiritual father.

II. We now consider, in the second place, the circumstances in the Colossian Church which filled St. Paul's heart with joy.

St. Paul rejoiced over the Colossian Christians because he beheld their order and the stedfastness of their faith in Christ. He might have been present in spirit with the Church at Colossae, and yet not have been able to rejoice. Had schism been rending the Church there, as we know it at one time came near to rending the Church at Corinth: had the members of the Church been falling into disorderly habits, or had superstitions and doubts been striking at the foundations of their faith, we know that the Apostle would have been present in spirit with the Church, not to rejoice, but to sorrow. But there was in the Church nothing to move the Apostle's grief. Some cause for anxiety he may have had; that was almost to be looked for, but for sorrow none. He was able to rejoice

because the Colossian Christians dwelt together in unity, maintained purity of life, and kept their faith firmly fixed on the Saviour. Nor was it wonderful that he did rejoice as he beheld the order and the stedfast faith of the Colossian Christians. What is there more suited to stir the joy of a true-hearted man or woman than to hear of, or to see, loved ones walking in ways of righteousness and purity? Parents, your boys and girls go out into the world, and you watch their progress with that interest which love alone can excite. You hear from time to time of their success in life, of the steps of promotion which they are winning, of the new friends who are taking an interest in them, of the kindly way in which their employers are acting towards them. And there is not an item of intelligence concerning their prosperity that does not send a thrill of thankful gladness through your hearts. Yet, after all, is it not your chief joy when you learn that no moral blot has fallen on their lives, that no evil habits are degrading them, that they are showing strong Christian principle, that they are walking in the truth? Even so, was it not natural that St. Paul, who did delight in hearing of the temporal prosperity of his spiritual children, should yet find his chief joy in knowing that they were continuing to walk in the light? To hear of their spiritual well-being was to hear that his labour had not been in vain in the Lord, was to hear that however severed from them for a time he might hope to meet them all at last.

And, my beloved, as St. Paul found, and naturally found, such a joy in beholding in spirit the order of the Colossian Christians and the stedfastness of their faith in Christ, so does every faithful minister find, and naturally find, a deep and lively joy in beholding, while he is among them, or in learning of when he is away from them, the charity, the purity, and the faith of his flock. Is it sad to see some fair tract suddenly stripped of its loveliness by the whirlwind or the flood, sad to see the stately pile scathed by fire or crumbling by neglect into deep decay, sad to see a glorious picture or a noble statue defaced by a careless or malicious hand? Ah! none of these sights is so sad to see as that of a Church torn by dissensions, or soiled by impurity, or fallen from living faith. And no sight is fairer to see than that of a united Church whose members are rich in all Christian graces and stedfast in their faith. Such a sight cheers the heart of a minister while he is with his flock, and spiritually seen of him is a joy to him when circumstances have severed him from them. The aged Apostle, as he sat in his place of confinement at Rome, his arm chained to that of the soldier who guarded him, forgot his bonds in his great joy over the order and faith of the Church at Colossae: and I think that no one, who in true-hearted earnestness has ministered to a congregation, can experience a deeper delight, when he is with that congregation no more, than to hear that love is regulating all the intercourse of the members with each

other, and that all are walking in faithfulness to the Saviour.

And now, my beloved brethren, I must bid you farewell*; but in doing so I would say with St. Paul that though I be absent in the flesh, yet shall I be with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ. Believe me that it is no lack of love to you that takes me away from you, that it is from no want of anxiety for your spiritual prosperity that I am about to leave you. Many considerations, into which I shall not now enter, have led me to believe that it is right in me to accept a new sphere of labour, but no change of place will ever make me change my feelings of love towards you. I shall never forget you, least of all shall I forget you at the throne of grace. If God spares me I trust from time to time to visit you and to address you from this pulpit which I have occupied so long. But whether the occasions of our meeting in future be few or many, I shall often be present with you in spirit. When you are meeting together in this house of prayer I shall be thinking of you and praying for you. And when I am visiting my new flock I shall not fail to remember how kindly and hearty were your greetings when I moved in and out among you. Whatever tidings I hear of your prosperity will bring great gladness to my heart. The intercourse between you and me has ever been of the warmest and the kindest. In your homes I

* Sermon preached by the Author when leaving Newcastle-on-Tyne.

have been a welcome guest, and whether I came to you in your joys or in your sorrows I have ever been regarded by you as a friend. In my own time of trial I know how you felt for me, and I shall not soon forget how, when I lay seemingly at the point of death, there was not one among you who did not come to make loving and anxious inquiries regarding me. You have loved me, I know, and I believe that you are grieved to part with me. Be sure that I have loved you and that I go from you in sorrow. I have striven to do my work among you faithfully. I have spent no idle time since I came among you. What hours were not devoted to study and preparation for the pulpit were spent by your sick-beds or at your firesides. I have striven to preach to you the whole truth of God, and if I have in any measure failed it is not because I have ever been careless about your spiritual well-being. I have prayed for you day by day, and God himself knows how eagerly I have longed for your souls. I have had a fair measure of ministerial success among you. The Church has greatly increased under my ministry, and you yourselves, I trust, will bear me witness that my labours among you have not been wholly in vain. I have had the help of some of you in the dispensation of the sacraments, in the prayer meeting, in the Sunday School, in the visitation of the sick, and in the management of the Church, and for that help I am deeply grateful. It cannot be then, beloved, that after all our years of loving and kindly intercourse I can lightly part

with you or soon forget you. No, I shall remember you while I live, remember you with love and gratitude, remember you as perhaps only a pastor can remember his people.

O! let me hear from time to time of your spiritual prosperity and your abiding love one to another. When another comes to occupy this pulpit, attend constantly and earnestly on his ministrations and uphold him by your love and your prayers. Ask God to give you a faithful pastor, and prepare yourselves to encourage him in his work of faith and labour of love. Do not dishearten him by any remissness of attendance in the house of prayer, and as you come regularly to hear the Word, seek ever to profit by it. O! strive all of you to live true and earnest lives, and to cultivate friendship one towards another. Let there be no divisions in the congregation, for divisions mean weakness and death. And let not your individual lives be less Christlike than they ought to be. Let your faith abound, let your holiness be manifest in God's sight. I have been long your spiritual guide, may I not call you my children, and say that I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in faith and love. Farewell, beloved in the Lord. Who knows when and where we may all meet again? Let this, at least, be sure, that we all meet where partings are unknown, in the home of our Father, in the presence of our Saviour.

XIII.

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus, the Lord, so walk ye in Him: rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.”—Colossians ii., 6-7.

PROGRESS is the law of all true Christian life. To stand still is impossible for the man who has heartily received Christ as his Saviour; to fall back is to shew, at least to fall back permanently is to shew, that Christ has never been really received as such, but that a transitory impulse has been mistaken for a genuine faith in Him. As in the natural world all healthy life is accompanied by, nay, manifests itself in, growth; as the tiny green shoot develops itself into the blade and the ear, as the seedling springs up into the tall and graceful tree, as the infant becomes the boy and then the man, so in the spiritual world life implies growth, the regenerate man advancing daily into the mature and developed Christian. Such is the teaching of Scripture everywhere, such, in a very marked way, the teaching of our text. Our text most distinctly intimates that in every true Christian life there is progress. This it teaches when it counsels us to walk in Christ. This it teaches when it speaks about being rooted

in Christ, the transition from the thought of a firmly fixed root to that of a growing tree being an easy one. This it teaches when it speaks about being built up in Christ, the thought of building being naturally one of growth and progress.

But our text does not speak only of growth and progress. It speaks also of firmness and stability. The Christian grows because he is firmly rooted, he is built up because he is well founded. All Christian progress is the result of true union with Christ. Without true union with Him there can be but decay and ruin. By true union with Him there must be life, growth, increase. The badly-rooted tree withers, and the ill-founded building totters and falls. It is the tree well-rooted in suitable soil that thrives and grows, and the building firmly established on a good foundation that can be made substantial and stately.

So it is the man rooted and founded in Christ that grows and develops into the fulness of the perfect Christian.

Our thoughts then are to be of the Christian's stability and of his growth. May God by His Spirit direct us in them all.

I. We consider, in the first place, the Christian's stability.

When we examine our text we see how anxious the Apostle is to impress on the readers of his Epistle the truth that genuine Christianity means the closest and most lasting personal union with the Saviour. You mark, my brethren, that Christ

himself, not Christian doctrine, is set forth as that in which the Christian has to walk, in which he has to be rooted, in which he has to be built up. At his conversion one receives Christ, and Christ is the object of all his after faith. There can be no doubt of the value of Christian doctrine. If our minds are imbued with false doctrine, and especially with false doctrine about Christ, if we fancy, for example, that Christ is only human, if we think of Him only as a moral teacher and not as a Saviour, then He cannot be to us the object of saving faith. We may justly say that true doctrine is the presentation to us of Christ as He is. Hence, true doctrine is of unspeakable importance, and no Christian will undervalue it. But, although true doctrine is of unspeakable importance, it is quite possible to be intellectually convinced of the truth of Christian doctrine and yet not to receive Christ as a Saviour. Between being intellectually convinced of the truth of Christian doctrine and trusting in Christ himself there is all the difference that there is between knowing and believing the common good report regarding an excellent and amiable person and knowing, loving and trusting that person himself. The Christian Church could not exist if there was not a general intellectual acceptance of Christian doctrine. Yet, surely we cannot regard all that belong to the Church as Christians in very truth. The true Christian is the man that with his heart believes in the living Christ.

Now, in our text, the Apostle speaks of receiving

Christ himself, and of walking in Him, and of being rooted and grounded in Him. And when he speaks of receiving Christ, he uses terms which shew that Christ is to be received in all the fulness of His saving power and of His divine personality. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus, the Lord." There are only two passages in Scripture in which we find the Saviour thus designated, namely, our text and the fifth verse of the fourth chapter of Second Corinthians. And indeed, when we turn to the original Greek, we find that the designation of our Lord in our text is even fuller than that in the other text. We must, to give its full force to our text, read it thus, "As ye have therefore received Jesus, the Christ, the Lord." (*Alford.*) The Christian, then, in receiving the Saviour must receive Him as the Christ, the anointed of God, and as the Lord, the divine Son of the Father. He must receive Jesus in all that fulness in which He appears in the Word, must receive Him as prophet, priest and king, must receive Him as one fitted to bestow every needed grace and worthy to receive the deepest homage, must receive Him as Saviour, Teacher, Guide and Master. In the Word Christ stands before us crowned with glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, and we must receive Him as thus He presents Himself to us. As Thomas, casting away his doubts for ever, hailed Christ as his Lord and his God, so must we do. It seems to me, my brethren, that what gives Christianity its true attractiveness, is its

central doctrine, that God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son to die for men. We must loyally receive the living Christ as God's Son and our Saviour. We must receive Christ in all the fulness of undoubting confidence, must receive Him with a large and loving faith, must receive Him with holiest reverence and yet with fullest trust. Our hearts must go out towards a living Christ, a Christ divine to protect us by His almighty power, and human to meet us with largest sympathy; a Christ who has died to save and who lives to bless. The faith of too many is but faith in dogma. Ours must be faith in a living Lord.

But we must remember, my friends, that the reception which we have to give to Christ, the divine Saviour, is not a reception once in a life and no more, is not a solitary one. The Christian does not exercise faith once only and then cease to exercise it. He continues, day by day, to cling lovingly and trustfully to the Saviour. The Apostle says, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus, the Lord, so walk ye in Him." The Colossians had, when Epaphras preached to them, received Christ. They had turned to Him as to one able to save them. But St. Paul did not bid them rest contented with the fact that they had, under the preaching of Epaphras, received Christ. He counselled them to preserve the closest and liveliest fellowship with Christ, nay, to live in constant union with Him. St. Paul does not simply say, "Walk with Christ," but "Walk in Christ." To

St. Paul's union with Christ was a reality of the deepest kind. To him the Christian life was not merely a life of sympathy with the Saviour, but a life in the Saviour. To him each living Christian was one of Christ's members, was, not in a figurative, but in a most real sense, a sharer in the life of Christ. To him Christ was the living head of all His true followers, they, the various members of His Body. Hence, even as Christ's command to His disciples was, "Abide in Me," St. Paul's counsel to his readers was, "Abide in Christ Jesus, the Lord." Unbroken union with Christ, that was to St. Paul the secret of all true Christian life. And, brethren, he only who lives in Christ truly lives. It is not, as it were, by catching once, or by catching now and again, a glimpse of Christ's divine and mediatorial glory, and rejoicing for the moment in that glimpse, that we can spiritually live. There may stand forth in any man's life, as he looks back upon it, a period of special religious impression, a period when to pray seemed natural and sweet, a period when the name of Jesus was like music in the ear. And yet the man may not be a religious man. The impressions, once so forcible and strong, may all have faded. I have no doubt that the inhabitants of the coldest climes experience now and then seasons of unwonted mildness. But, because now and then, in a cold and desolate land, a season somewhat less severe than usual comes, one would not therefore denominate the climate mild. And because a man may once, or even more

than once, have been under religious impressions, one does not necessarily think him a religious man. People may indeed deceive themselves and fancy that they are religious because they have at one time felt impressed by religious considerations, but the truly religious man is he who abides in Christ, he who walks in Christ. We must walk in Christ, not swerving from fellowship with Him, not departing from our life in Him, not turning at all from Him, but clinging to Him as those who know that separation from Him means death. We must walk in Christ. Even as the true traveller turns not to the right hand or to the left, but steadily pursues his way, so must we remain in Christ, dreaming not of any separation from Him. "Walk ye in Him." These words certainly teach us the necessity of a stable and abiding union with the Saviour. And the words, "Rooted and built up in Him," teach us the same. For where do we find a closer union than that between the tree and the soil in which its roots are so firmly set, or that between the building and the ground in which its foundations are so strongly laid, or rather between the super-structure and those foundations on which it rests? "Rooted in Christ." Does the tree send down into the ground the great mass of roots by which it draws up sustenance, and by means of whose strong grasp it stoutly resists the gales which sweep wildly by; and shall we take the words, "Rooted in Him," as teaching us other than this, that with the strongest grasp we must lay hold on Christ, and

that to Him we must constantly direct ourselves that we may have from Him our life? "Rooted in Christ." Do not these words speak of our whole strength being constantly sought from Christ, of the very springs of our spiritual existence being in Christ, of our knowing nothing of separation from Christ. And, as if even the words, "Rooted in Him," expressive as they are, were not fully expressive of our constant abiding in Christ, do not the added words, "Built up in Him," speak with intensest force of the Christian life as a life of continual resting on Him? Friends, the Christian is just the man to whom Christ is everything, who knows nothing but Christ, rests on nothing but Christ, never turns from Christ, the man who is, as the Apostle puts it in our text, established in the faith. For these words, "established in the faith," are just the literal expression of the great truth of which the words we have been considering are the figurative one, the great truth that by the instrumentality of the faith, that is, of a living trust, we must continue united to Christ. Not wayward and fickle, but stedfast we must be, remaining with our whole hearts knit to Christ, with our fullest trust ever fixed upon Him.

II. Let us now consider, in the second place, the Christian's progress and growth.

The various expressions, "Walk ye in Him," "Rooted in Him," and "Built up in Him," to which I have directed your attention, as pointing to

close and permanent union with Christ, point no less truly to continual Christian progress.

Surely the words, "Walk ye in Him," indicate progress. If any one should think of the summit of Christian excellence as being soon and easily reached, if any one should imagine that, once converted, the Christian has nothing more to struggle after, the words, "Walk ye in Him," should shew him his error. The very idea of the word, "Walk," is the idea of advancement, of going forward. Nor can the Christian stand still. True Christian life is a progress onward and upward, a heavenward pilgrimage, at every step of which one acquires something more of the spirit of the country whither he is journeying. Day by day the Christian draws nearer to God, comes into fuller communion with Him, enters into heartier friendship with Him. Day by day he approaches nearer the ideal of Christian life. Walking in Christ he rises more and more to the true Christlike character. It is true that the Christian does not become perfect on this side of the grave, does not become absolutely free from sin, does not do all his duty ; but, although he does not attain perfection, he constantly advances towards it. He presses onward, leaving behind him his old self and drawing closer to a new and perfect manhood. We find some people evermore bewailing that they are not what they once were, that they have lost the purity and the fervour of their earlier days. But true Christianity is not a sorrowful looking back upon the past, a mournful retrospect

to days that were brighter with heaven's light, a lingering regret of a lost Eden. It is a pressing forward to the true Eden, it is a hopeful anticipation of higher and better things, it is a conviction that a holier life may be attained and a continual striving after the attainment of it. St. Paul speaks of the Christian life as a life of progress, a life in which the past is, as it were, forgotten in the eagerness of the pursuit of higher things. "Brethren," says he, "I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Progress, then, is the rule of the Christian life. The Christian, in virtue of his union with Christ, and under the influence of God's Holy Spirit, becomes daily purer, wiser, stronger, more loving, more patient, more devout.

Now, while the words, "Walk ye in Him," point to this Christian progress, other words in our text also point to it. Surely the words, "Rooted in Him," convey to us, at least indirectly, the idea of progress, of growth. For when we think of strong roots penetrating deep into the ground and drawing from the earth abundant nutriment, we naturally think at the same time of a trunk increasing in massive grandeur and strength, and leafy branches casting an ever widening shadow on the ground. So then, from the words, "Rooted in Him," we are naturally led to think of Christian growth, of

increase in spiritual fulness and strength. And indeed another Apostle directly counsels Christians to grow in grace, so that what our text, by its words, "Rooted in Him," suggests, is plainly spoken of elsewhere.

Still further, the words, "Built up in Him," point to Christian progress. They tell of a work going on, of an edifice being raised, of a temple, fair and holy, being carried onwards towards completion. Building is a process calling for time and care; and hence, to speak of Christians as being built up in Christ is to suggest at once the idea of their steady advancement, of their daily spiritual progress, of their virtues and graces receiving ever new accessions of fulness, even as, until it is complete, the building is ever receiving tier on tier of prepared and carefully adjusted stones.

In every way then are our minds impressed with the thought that the Christian life is not a life of standing still, but a life of constant advancement, a life of true growth and increase, a life of deepening holiness and love, a life of increasing strength and stedfastness. The Christian, being established in the faith, should abound in it, and abound in it ever more and more. And in proportion to his abounding in the faith will be his abounding in all Christian virtues. So surely, as one increases in the fulness of trust in his Saviour, will he increase in likeness to the Saviour in all things.

And now let me close my remarks, dear brethren, by urging you to have your faith firmly

fixed in Christ, and to be ever more fruitful in good. Keep your faith firmly fixed on Christ; trust Him at all times and with all your heart, for, if you have not faith, spiritual growth is impossible. But, having faith, increase in godliness, in love, in patience, in all that is good. Like the good tree, not yet at its maturity, but still constantly increasing in strength and beauty, like the noble edifice, not yet in all the glory of its finished state, but ever advancing towards completion, see that you advance constantly in faith and in the Christian virtues and graces which are its fruits. With thanksgiving to God that He has given you His Son to be your Saviour and your pattern, hold stedfastly onwards towards loftier attainments. At length the perfection desired and struggled after will be yours, the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus safe in your hands.

XIV.

“ Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power.”—Colossians ii., 8-10.

WHEN one looks for the keynote of this text he finds it in the words, “After Christ.” The supreme object of Christian faith and love and devotion is ever to be Christ himself. I do not of course mean that we are not to give our ceaseless worship, love and homage to our heavenly Father and to the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. God, in the fulness of His threefold personality, is ever to be loved and adored by us. But I do mean that we are to love the Father as He has been revealed to us in the Son, that we are to draw near to Him through the Son, and that we are to rest for our salvation on Christ, and have Him as our Teacher and Guide through His Spirit. The theme of St. Paul’s whole Epistle to the Colossians may truly be said to be Christ, the aim of that Epistle may fitly be declared to be the setting forth of the glory, grace and absolute sufficiency of Christ. We see no stars when the sun is above the horizon, the light of all

other luminaries being lost in his. And to St. Paul, as he wrote our Epistle, Christ was as the sun shining in his strength. He saw nothing save the glory of the Redeemer, the glory of Him in Whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Now, as St. Paul looked at Christ, so must we. He must be all to us, our sufficient surety, our perfect pattern and guide, our one intercessor, our abiding friend. And whatever is not after Christ, whatever tends to turn away our attention from Him, whatever hides, even in the smallest degree, His glory from us, is something which we must earnestly shun.

In some of my previous sermons from the Epistle to the Colossians, I have had occasion to remark that St. Paul was afraid of these converts being led astray from their simple faith in Christ. Some teacher or teachers had come to Colossae bringing a strange new philosophy, a patchwork, one might call it, of Christianity, Oriental speculation and Jewish ritualism, and there was a fear in the Apostle's mind that the Colossian converts might be beguiled by this. Hence it was that he wrote to them, in the words of our text, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." He would have no so-called philosophy obscure for his Colossian converts the truth of God, no mere ritual observances come between them and Christ. St. Paul was passionately and enthusiastically loyal

to his Master, knowing that He alone could save and bless men, and he dreaded nothing more than that any influence should turn men away from their allegiance to Christ. Hence the eager, almost passionate, warning of our text.

In our meditations on our text we desire to consider, in the first place, the Apostle's warning, and in the second place, the argument by which this warning is enforced.

I. Let us consider, in the first place, the Apostle's warning.

He says, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit."

The word "spoil," as used in our text, does not mean "destroy" or "rob," but "make a prey of." The Apostle thinks of the false teacher (or perhaps teachers) as making those, who were led to follow him or them, his or their prey or spoil. It seems to me that he is contrasting these false teachers with Christ in reference to their relation to men and his. They made men their prey, their spoil, their captives; he made them free, delivered them. The ambitious teacher is much more anxious to have followers than to do any real good to those who listen to him. There is, indeed, always a temptation to the teacher to magnify himself, but all men do not yield to this temptation. There are those who do forget themselves in the truth which they teach, and who, if they are Christian teachers, forget themselves in setting forth Christ. But the ambitious, self-confident man cares more for his

own glory than for anything else, and is simply eager that men should accept his opinions. How far these opinions are sound troubles him very little. I do not indeed say that the teaching of the ambitious man is always wrong, or that of the earnest one always right. An earnest man may err in some things, a mere rhetorician may set forth much truth. Yet the man who is full of ambition thinks much more of the glory which his utterances will bring him than of the truth and genuine moral and spiritual value of these utterances. He wants men to admire him, and he is more anxious to say what will strike than what will really benefit them. Now, if such a man holds a place in a Christian community, and teaching, not truth, but misleading fancies of his own, yet induces men to heed him and accept him as their guide, then he simply makes spoil of them, enslaves them. How different is it with Christ! Those that hold close to Him are not enslaved, are not made spoil of. No doubt Christ asks for men's entire submission, yet a submission in which the mind is convinced, not enslaved, and through which highest benefit comes to the soul. This contrast between the false teacher and Christ seems to me to be set forth in St. Paul's words, "Beware lest any man spoil you, carry you away, that is, as his spoil." Very different was the pretentious man, eager to make proselytes, from the gracious Lord eager to save.

Now, what the Apostle was so eager that his converts might be preserved from was being made

the spoil of those who came to them in the guise of men eager to impart to them a higher wisdom. Throughout the civilized world, in the Apostle's time, there was a great regard paid to everything that bore the name of philosophy, and the teacher of philosophy was everywhere held in high esteem. St. Paul certainly, although he must have known Greek philosophy well, made no claim to be a philosopher. He was simply a servant of Christ, proclaiming to men the good tidings of salvation, and his teaching, noble and fervent as it was, was exceedingly unlike the usual philosophic dissertation. But a love of what claimed to be philosophy was, as I have said, very prevalent, and even in the Churches which St. Paul himself had founded I can well believe that there might be converts who, although they had accepted his teaching, had yet somewhat regretted that he was so little philosophical in his methods and utterances. And in a Church like that at Colossae, which St. Paul seems not to have founded or visited, we can easily believe that the common regard for all that professed to be philosophical would easily induce men to welcome a teacher or teachers that came to them claiming to have a philosophical system to teach. Now we cannot suppose the Apostle to have had an objection to all philosophy. Philosophy in its best sense is a good thing. Men cannot help thinking about the wonderful universe in which they find themselves, and the no less wonderful mental and moral constitution which their great Creator has given

themselves, and true philosophy is nothing other than men's best thoughts about the highest things that can be the objects of thought. Against a true and reverent discussion of great moral and social questions St. Paul certainly could have had no objections. What he did object to was philosophy and vain deceit, the mere specious profession of philosophy, the jangle of learned phrases, the building up of mere cloud castles of speculation, specially the obscuring of divine truth by human fancy. Much, that in all ages has been called philosophy, has been mere dreaming, although sometimes it has been very harmless dreaming. But not a little of what has purported to be philosophy has been morally hurtful to those who have accepted it, inasmuch as it has darkened for them the light of God. And it was by philosophy of that kind that St. Paul dreaded the converts at Colossae might be led astray. The philosopher or philosophers in the Christian Church at Colossae followed the traditions of men and regarded the rudiments of the world, exalted, in other words, the human above the divine, and gave to rites and ceremonies a value which they could not possess. It is not needful that in our consideration of our present text we should discuss at length what were these traditions of men and these elements of the world to which St. Paul makes allusion. The traditions were seemingly a mixture of Greek and Oriental speculations on the nature of God and the way in which He may be approached, and the

rudiments of the world were Jewish and other rites and ceremonies. But it is not of special importance to determine exactly what the heretical teacher or teachers at Colossae taught. The great matter to be observed is that he or they did not teach after Christ. Professing to hold the Christian faith, they yet taught in place of it mere human fancy, and it was because of this that St. Paul characterized their philosophy as vain deceit. And the sum of his warning to the Colossian Christians was just this, that they should beware of any self-styled philosophy that elevated erring human speculation to the level of divine doctrine, and that substituted a lifeless ceremonial worship for a living Christ. Let them follow such a philosophy and they would be but the led captives of men instead of the freemen of Christ.

Now, my dear brethren, do we at this day need any such warning as that which St. Paul addressed to the Colossians? I fear we do. Error is not peculiar to one age or country, but is found in all ages and in all lands. Even the same errors reappear from age to age, reappear in a new dress, it may be, but substantially unchanged. And assuredly there has been no age in which it has not been too common for men to take mere human speculation as if it were the truth of God.

We need therefore to be warned against too great dependence on man. No doubt we have all to depend a great deal on the knowledge of others. Each man cannot be a master of all knowledge, and

in many things we have simply to appeal to those who do know for direction and guidance, or at least for information, in regard to the matters of which we are ignorant ourselves. Yet, let us take heed that we do not too readily accept any man's authority in regard to spiritual things. We do well, indeed, to hearken to the counsels of those who call us to a nobler life and a richer faith in God and our Saviour; nay, we do well to ponder deeply the utterances of those who have thought much about spiritual things. But we do not well to be the blind followers of any man. Let us think for ourselves, using the reason and conscience which God has given us, and applying, as fully as we can, to all teachings the standard of God's inspired Word. What we believe is always likely to have a certain influence on our lives, and pity it were that through a blind bowing to authority we should cherish beliefs that in any way militated against our spiritual progress. Yes, even we in this Christian land and age must take heed of becoming the mere captives of man.

• Specially do we need to be warned against philosophy and vain deceit. I do not mean that we need to be warned against wide reading and intelligent interest in the questions that most largely occupy men's minds in our time. What I mean is that we need to be warned against such teaching as is not after Christ. Much of the thought of the present day is assuredly not after Him; nay, I fear that not all which goes by the name of Christian

thought is really after Him. There are still those that have nothing better to offer us than the traditions of men, mere specious human speculation obscuring the truth of God, and those also that have nothing higher to recommend than the rudiments of the world, mere forms and ceremonies taking the place of a living Christ. What we need to do is to cling close to the Saviour, to seek our enlightenment and inspiration in His teaching and our souls' peace in constant communion with Him. I wish to be no bigot, I fain would avoid that narrowness of view which makes it impossible for a man to see that there is good in any teaching that is not in all things in agreement with his own. I am indeed eager to be tolerant and to allow every man to speak out his own genuine convictions. Still, I cannot help echoing St. Paul's warning, "Beware lest any man make a spoil of you through philosophy and vain deceit." Do not rashly accept everything that comes to you with the name of advanced or liberal thought, but see that what is offered you leaves to you still your living Saviour. Nothing can supply in your hearts the place of the living Christ. "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him," said the weeping Mary. It was sad to her that she could not pay the last offices of love to the dead Christ. What a loss is it for those from whom, through vain deceit, the living Christ is taken away!

II. Let us now consider, in the second place,

the argument by which St. Paul's warning is supported.

That argument is stated in the words, "For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily and ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power."

There was ample reason surely why St. Paul should warn the Colossians against any teaching that should turn them away from Christ, when all the fulness of the Godhead bodily dwelt in Him, and when they in consequence could have every spiritual need supplied by Him. The false philosophy which was being pressed on men's attention at Colossae derogated from Christ's glory and His all-sufficiency, setting forth as it did the necessity of angel mediators on the one hand and of Jewish or other rites and ceremonies on the other. At the root of it all there lay, I fancy, the thought of God as very remote and very inaccessible, so that He could only be approached through many mediators and by means of many ceremonies and probably also ascetic practices. Against this teaching St. Paul declared that God in His fulness dwelt in the risen and glorified Christ, and that men had but to come to Him to be filled out of the fulness of God.

(1) Our text contains a very clear and emphatic declaration of the super-eminent glory of Christ. St. Paul does not simply say that Christ was the greatest of all teachers, and that the world's most famous philosophers were, when compared with

Him, but as children requiring to be instructed. He does not even say that He was simply the greatest and best of men, beside Whom even the holiest saints appeared as full of weakness and shortcoming. No, he says that the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth in Him bodily, and that He is the head of all principality and power. Angels even are not to be compared with Him, for in none of them does the fulness of the Godhead dwell. They may be principalities and powers, but He is the head of all principality and power. He is indeed divine, and that in no limited sense of the word, but in the fullest and highest sense. How natural then that St. Paul should warn those to whom He wrote to welcome no philosophy that would turn them away from a due regard for this divine and glorious Being !

(2) Yet St. Paul, setting forth the glory of Christ so fully, does not therefore present Christ Himself as remote from men and only to be approached through other mediators. Nay, rather he so speaks of Him as to suggest the thought that we can go to Him and find in Him the true mediator. He uses a word to remind men how near Christ is to them, the word "bodily." "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Surely we have here a suggestion that He in Whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells is yet near akin to us, even of our very flesh and blood. I may be wrong, but it seems to me very clear that St. Paul uses the word "bodily" to remind us of

the true humanity of our Lord, and thus to teach us that instead of God being remote from us He is in truth very near us. The divine and the human meet in the very person of our Lord, and we have but to draw near to Him, who is one with us, to draw near to the divine. We need no mediator between us and Christ, for He is in very truth one in nature with ourselves, yet, coming to Him, it is not simply to a loving and gracious man that we come, but to the very Son of God. And coming to Christ we come to the Father whose fulness dwells in Him. Again I say, how natural it was that St. Paul should warn his friends in Colossae against the philosophy and vain deceit to which they were in danger of paying attention. That philosophy put many mediators between man and God; nay, drew their thoughts away from the one mediator. How much better surely that not vain but divine philosophy which recognised all the glory of Christ and yet proclaimed Him the way to the Father!

(3) But St. Paul points out more than the glory of Christ. In Christ all fulness dwells, and we need but to come to Him to have all our wants supplied out of that fulness. An attempt was being made to convince the Colossian Christians that they needed something more than Christ could give them. Foolish dream! What spiritual need can we have—guidance, strength, pardon, peace, consolation, eternal life—that Christ is unable to supply. Those that are in Him are complete in

Him, have their part, that is, in His divine fulness. How idle it is for men to hew out cisterns for themselves when the living fountain is beside them. Yet this was what the strange teacher or teachers in Colossae wanted the Christians there to do. They would have them to look to angel mediators and practise formal rites that they might have a richer Christian life. They were, in doing so, really asking them to turn from divine fulness to creature emptiness. And because St. Paul was so entirely loyal to Christ, and was at the same time so eager for the true good of men, he counselled the Colossian Christians to beware that no man made them his spoil.

My brethren, it is because Christ is at once so worthy of your homage and so able to impart all blessings to you that I urge you to let nothing turn you in the smallest degree away from Him. Beware of all that is not after Christ. For whatsoever turns you from Christ robs Him of the love and homage which are His due, and robs you of the blessedness which should be yours. Assuredly it is but injuring oneself to turn from Christ. One great social problem that presses for solution is, how to deal with the terrible poverty that is to be found in our midst. There must be a solution for that problem, although I am very doubtful if statesmen will ever find it. But the great problem of how to meet men's deep spiritual needs does not wait for solution. All fulness dwells in the living Christ, and we can know no spiritual poverty if we are in

Him. Again then I say, be sure you follow no path that does not lead you after Christ. Give Him your loving trust and out of His fulness you will receive grace for grace.

XV.

"In Whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead."—Colossians ii., 11-12.

THE poet lives in a world of his own, a world of ideal brightness and beauty. I do not mean that this actual world has no charm for him. Its beauty indeed delights him, its varied life attracts his keenest interest, its music, the music of soft winds and falling waters and tuneful birds, gladdens his heart. Yet has he his own world, a world of bright dreams and fair fancies, a world whose beauty, when he reveals it to us, we can admire, but which, void of his creative imagination, we could not fashion for ourselves. Was the Apostle Paul just a poet who lived in a world of his own imagining, a world bright, beautiful, attractive, but very unlike the real? We know a good deal about the Apostle's every day experiences, that he had often to endure bitter hardships and cruel persecutions, that he had to maintain himself by rough manual labour, that he was often ill-provided with food and raiment.

We know too not a little about the condition of not a few of the early Christians, that many of them belonged to the humbler ranks of society, some of them being even in the condition of slaves, and that all of them were lightly regarded by the world and were exposed to persecutions and insults. Yet St. Paul writes of himself and his fellow Christians as already citizens of the heavenly kingdom, as risen with Christ the Lord, as sharing in His triumphs, as even sitting with Him in heavenly places. Now, I ask again, was St. Paul just a poetic dreamer, fashioning bright visions for himself, escaping from an actual world of pain and hardship by shaping for himself an ideal world of beauty and gladness? Even those of us who are almost void of anything like poetic fancy do at times indulge in little reveries, in day-dreams of our own. We have had in all likelihood our share of trials, have had work and few comforts, have never possessed and do not expect ever to possess much, but we are for the moment in a hopeful mood, and we picture for ourselves a coming day when our trials will be fewer, our circumstances less straitened, our labours lighter, and our days less dimmed with care. Now, while we are enjoying these pleasant visions of a day that may never really come, our actual troubles are forgotten.

The pleasant vision may last but a little time, but it is comforting while it lasts. Was it then that he might find for himself and afford to others a solace amid the many trials of life, that St. Paul,

being a man of vivid poetic imagination, fashioned in fancy a world which had no existence in fact, a world in which men and women, occupied to all appearance in common toils and beset by varied trials, were pictured as glorified, exalted and living the very life of heaven? Well, there are those doubtless to whom the Apostle appears but a dreamer who lived much in a world of pure imagination, yet was he no dreamer, but one who saw clearly things which many see but dimly, if at all. There are those whose vision is so narrowed that they can scarce discern the fair features of the world around them. Yet, these fair features exist, and unfold themselves to all whose vision is clear. Even so to St. Paul's clear spiritual sight many things were clear which others failed and fail to see. St. Paul saw one thing which none need have failed to see, the spirituality of many lives that had once been unspiritual enough. And seeing this he saw something more, he saw what it was that made these lives possible. He saw that it was the entrance into men's souls of a new and heavenly influence, the coming of a power that transformed men and made them new creatures. Behind the effect, in other words, St. Paul saw the great divine cause. He knew that men could not shape themselves anew. Men, no doubt, some men at least, can so far reform their outer lives, can give up this and the other foolish or evil habit, although indeed it hardly seems as if all men could even do thus much. But that radical change of life which is

implied in genuine Christianity is, and this St. Paul knew well, beyond the native power of man to effect. Seeing it, therefore, he declared it to be divinely wrought. The new life of the Christian is Christ's life in the soul. We die with Christ to sin, we live with Him to holiness. It is no dream of a poetic fancy, but a blessed truth, that Christians are risen with Christ. In the world they yet are not of the world, but live in a new world of whose life and blessedness Christ is the centre and source. They are in Christ, that is the great central fact of their lives, the fact which gives to these lives a distinctive meaning and character. They are in Christ, and their being in Him means both death and life, death to an old order of things and life in a new, death to the earthly and life to the heavenly. Let us meditate now on this death in Christ and this life in Christ.

I. Let us consider, in the first place, the Christian's death and burial in Christ.

The death and burial of our text are the death and burial of the flesh. Christians are spoken of as "circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body (of the sins) of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ," and as "buried with Him in baptism." Under the two figures of circumcision and baptism the Apostle sets before us the destruction of the flesh in the Christian man. This destruction of the flesh is the necessary condition of all true Christian living. We can only begin to live spiritually when the flesh dies in us,

and it dies in us when we are in Christ. Now, we must note that in our text St. Paul is practically dealing with sanctification, not, and certainly not chiefly, with justification. I do indeed think that justification was never far away from St. Paul's thoughts, and specially that it was not away from them when he was speaking or writing about the death of Christ. Now, undoubtedly it is in virtue of Christ's death for us that we are justified, and it is ever to be remembered by us with gratitude that all believers have died with Christ to the guilt of sin. And should you think that in our text St. Paul alludes, as he undoubtedly does in the verses following our text, to our death in Christ to sin's guilt, I shall not say that you are wrong. But I do think that the death of our text is mainly the Christian's death to sin itself. When one is in Christ, the body of the flesh is dead and buried.

(1) Believers died to sin in Christ's death. Our Lord's death and burial ended His humiliation, His being numbered with the transgressors, His whole contact with sin. Himself sinless and spotless, our Lord was sent in the likeness of sinful flesh, had to mingle with sinful men and witness their evil ways, took their sins as a great burden on His heart, nay, even bare their sins in His own body on the tree. But this, His close contact with sin, ended with His death and burial. The risen and glorified Christ does indeed pity sinful men and intercede for them, but it is no longer possible for Him to be numbered with transgressors,

and, although He still wears our nature, surely we cannot say that He appears in the "likeness of sinful flesh." On the cross He died to sin, died to it not only in the sense that He made full atonement for it, but also in the sense that He passed, as we may say, out of the sphere of it. His whole trying connection with it was done. And just because He is the covenant head and representative of the whole body of believers it may be said with truth that in Him all His people died to sin.

(2) But what all believers did in the person of their representative and covenant head each believer does in his own person. The man that by faith becomes one with Christ literally and personally dies to sin. He is circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, and he is buried with Christ in baptism. He puts off, puts away, buries the body of the flesh. The spiritual meaning of circumcision was the destruction of the flesh, and the spiritual meaning of baptism is its burial. Probably in the early Christian ages baptism was in most cases by immersion. One was, as we may say, buried in the waters, to signify his partaking in the death and burial of Christ. But even if immersion was not practised, and there are very many who believe it was not, the washing with water had practically the same meaning, for it signified spiritually the putting away of the sins of the flesh, it meant death to sin. The rite of circumcision under the old economy and the rite of baptism under the new mean the same thing. They mean

the destruction of the power of sin in the soul of man. In truth, my brethren, when we become one with Christ, our old sinful self dies. How could it be otherwise? How could we have sin continuing as a living power in those who are the very members of Christ's body? Even if we think only of what may be called the moral influence of a surrender of the soul to Christ, we can see that to continue in sin is impossible for the Christian man. If we have a very great regard for any person, if we come to share his ideas and to put confidence in his judgments, we shall have our lives more or less conformed to his, shall be in some measure at least like him. And if we come to reverence the Lord Jesus Christ, to admire the spotless beauty of His life, to accept His teaching, and to seek true fellowship with Him, our very doing of this will move us to hate evil. We cannot admire and love Christ, and yet take pleasure in those things that are utterly abhorrent to Him. Even then, were there nothing more than a lively sympathy between us and the the Saviour, that very sympathy would have its influence upon our hearts and lives. But there is something more. There is the work of God's Spirit on the human soul. By His Spirit our Lord destroys the old man within us. We read of a circumcision made without hands, and what is this circumcision but the destruction by divine power of the body of the flesh? We read of our being buried with Christ in baptism, but surely the baptism is more than baptism with water. It is the baptism

of which John spoke, the baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Let us become one with Christ by faith and a direct heavenly working fashions us anew. Of this working we are, it is true, only conscious through its results. The Spirit of God works silently on the heart, even as the spring sunshine works silently on the world. But although the Spirit works silently He does work, and the very beginning of His working is the putting away of the body of the flesh, the destruction of the life of sin in the soul. At a man's conversion the flesh dies in him. I do not mean that the believer's life is a life of absolute and sinless perfection. But I do mean that from the day of his conversion he has ceased to be under the power of the flesh. He hates sin, he struggles against it, he strives in God's strength to live free from it. And surely if there is in a man's heart a burning hatred of sin, combined with a fervent longing for righteousness, there is clear proof that the man has passed from under the domain of nature and come under that of grace.

Now, I can quite well fancy that I hear some objector saying to me that I am speaking too strongly when I say that in every truly converted man the flesh is dead and buried. Look around you, such an objector will say, and you will see imperfection everywhere. You will find many worthy people, many kindly, pleasant people, many well-meaning, pious people, many honest, truthful people, but none without infirmities, without defects.

How can it be said then that the flesh is dead in any? Well, I do not say that all creature weakness is gone from the Christian man, that he cannot be tempted, that he cannot do wrong, but I do say still that the flesh in him is dead. It is dead in the sense that it is no longer the ruling power in the man's life. He strives to mortify it, not to gratify it. He has passed out of that state wherein he was only concerned about pleasing himself and had no eagerness to please God. He knows indeed what it is to have to struggle against temptation, alas! he also knows what it is, through unwatchfulness, to be overtaken in a fault. But his will is toward good, his aim is to live in holiness, the central, controlling purpose of his life is to do the will of God. And surely, if all this is true, then it is also true that with him old things have passed away, and that he is no longer after the flesh. He is dead to sin, and not simply dead to it in his great Representative and Head, but dead to it in himself. It is indeed in virtue of his union with Christ that he is dead to it, but his death to it is matter of personal experience, of direct consciousness. He knows the change which the power of Christ has wrought in him. Like the lepers whom our Lord sent to show themselves to the priest, and who, as they went on their way, were conscious that they had been cleansed, he feels within himself that his Lord has wrought a blessed change in him. He knows that he has been circumcised with the circumcision made without hands.

Beloved, has this great change been made in us? Have we, through the power of Christ, put off the "old man"? The love of the world and of sin cannot reign in the heart of him that has become one with Christ. Has that love of the world and of sin passed away from our hearts? If it has not what do all our religious professions avail us? If a man has not the spirit of Christ he is none of His.

II. Let us now consider, in the second place, the Christian's resurrection with Christ.

(1) The Christian is a partaker in a new, glorious and blessed life, even the risen life of Christ. When our Lord rose from the dead and ascended up on high, His whole body of believing servants rose with Him. What the great Representative and Head of the Church did, all that He represented did with Him. Believers have to live out their lives under earthly conditions, have to toil and suffer as other men, have to experience, as others do, hunger and thirst and weariness, nay, have to meet and struggle with temptations. Yet they do not in truth belong to earth, they are of the kingdom of heaven, their true home is where their risen Head is. In Christ they are even now in heavenly places. The mariner, voyaging in far distant seas, does not regard as home the harbour in which his vessel lies for a time. His home is in the far away land where his loved ones are, and which he hopes, be it after long months and much tossing on stormy waters, to reach. And the

Christian's true home is where his loved Saviour is, and where he hopes ere long to be with his Saviour. But, in truth, it is not simply because his heart is in heaven, and his hopes reach out toward heaven, that the Christian regards it as his home. He is so truly united with Christ that even now he may be said to be dwelling with Him above. The Apostle says, "Wherein ye are risen with Him." In baptism symbolically, by union with Christ literally, the Christian is already risen into a new and heavenly life. I feel, my brethren, that I have no words wherewith to express, as I should wish to express, the great realities with which the Apostle deals in our text. But this I desire to impress on you, that the believer is in Christ and that, because he is so, he is already a partaker in Christ's risen life and glory. St. Paul is not simply speaking of something that is to be hereafter. No doubt all that is to be in the eternal future of the believer is involved in his being risen with Christ. But we must not limit the meaning of the gracious words of our text. We, if we are believers, are risen with Christ here and now. Our true life is even now a heavenly life.

(2) And, my brethren, not only are we, as believers, sharers in the risen life of Christ, who is our Representative and our covenant Head, but we in our own persons live a new life through the working of His Spirit in our hearts. In other words, our partaking in Christ's life becomes a matter of Christian experience. In treating of the first part

of our text I said that we experienced personally death to sin, and I now add that we experience personally quickening to holiness. We not only accept it as matter of faith that we have been raised with Christ, but we have the witness of our being so raised in our own renewed lives. We are members of Christ, and the life of Christ reveals itself in us. In one sense our relation to Christ is one that belongs wholly to the region of things unseen. Our union with Him, our death with Him, our life with Him, all belong, in one sense, to a sphere of which ordinary experience knows nothing. But in another and yet a most true sense our relation to Him is one that enters abundantly into the sphere of consciousness. We are conscious of the change that by His Spirit He has wrought in us, of new joys, of new aspirations, of new aims, of a new view of the meaning of life, of new strength, of new hope. When life has received a new direction, when our supreme anxiety is to please God, when pride is humbled, when the flesh is crucified, we cannot but be conscious that Christ has come in His saving power to our hearts. And so He must have come, if we are Christians indeed. What then is the instrumentality by which we are enabled to share in Christ's death and life? It is faith, "faith in the operation or working of God, who raised Christ from the dead," and raises us with Him. There is nothing possible for us till we believe. Let us be without faith in Christ and in God who gave Christ to save us, and we cannot

have either deliverance from guilt or emancipation from the power of sin. There is indeed no merit in our faith. As has been said with truth, faith is but the stretching out of the hand to receive the divine gift. Yet the hand must be stretched out or the gift cannot be received. Till we believe that God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, and come in truth to rest on the living Christ, we are strangers to all the blessedness that should be ours. My brethren, let none of us be void of faith. Let us rest on Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, and then all true blessedness will be ours. Then even here we shall share in the risen life of Christ, and hereafter where He is we shall be with Him for ever.

XVI.

“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross.”—Colossians ii., 13-14.

“THEREFORE,” says St. Paul, “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” Yet the law abides through the ages, an imperishable revelation, written on the hearts and consciences of men and on the pages of Scripture. Is there, then, no hope for mankind? Must the law remain, like some dread rock, a terrible object against which men can only be dashed and broken? Is deliverance beyond the hope of men, and is there nothing for them but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour them as the adversaries of God? No, my brethren, the condition of man is not hopeless. It is true that he cannot be justified by the deeds of the law, but the law itself, as an accusing and condemning thing, has been blotted out and nailed to the cross, and hence for those that believe there is freedom from condemnation. The words of our present text are as

consolatory as the words of our morning text—“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight”—are alarming. The former point as surely to deliverance, as the latter point to condemnation. The morning text took us to Sinai with its darkness and tempest, with its law demanding a perfect obedience which man cannot render: our present text takes us to Calvary where the thunders of the law are hushed and the voice of mercy falls sweetly on the ear. Awakened then by the declaration that there can be no justification by the deeds of the law, let us turn for consolation to that word which tells us that the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, has been taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross; and which sweetly assures us of the pardon of all our transgressions in Christ Jesus.

And in our meditations let us consider, in the first place, the miserable natural condition of all men; in the second place, the blessed condition of believers, and in the last place, the work of God which He wrought once for all in Christ, and which made this condition of believers a possibility.

I. Let us consider, in the first place, the natural condition of men, a very miserable condition, as exemplified in the case of the Colossians.

“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh.” These words were spoken to men gathered out of heathenism, to men who, as uncircumcised, had been out of the old

Jewish commonwealth, away from its privileges and strangers to God. But although the word, "uncircumcision," naturally leads our thoughts to the distinction that existed of old between Jew and Gentile, and to the exclusion of the Gentiles, remaining uncircumcised, from the covenant of God with Abraham, we are not to think that the mere fact of being circumcised gave the Jews spiritual life. You will note that St. Paul speaks not of mere uncircumcision, but of uncircumcision of the flesh, that is, of uncircumcision which consists in the prevailing of the flesh against the spirit; and speaking thus he points clearly to the fact that so long as the flesh was predominant circumcision availed the Jew nothing. It is then not of a state peculiar to the Gentiles as opposed to the Jews that the Apostle speaks in our text. The Gentiles had neither the inner grace nor the outward sign of that grace, but the Jews were little profited in having the sign if they had not that which it signified. Nor is it of a state peculiar to the heathen as against those brought up amid Christian influences that our Lord's Apostle speaks. It is perfectly true that in heathen lands men often sink into a state of the deepest moral degradation, but not the heathen only are dead in sins. Wherever the flesh is not crucified, wherever there is not circumcision of the heart, wherever there is not that new birth of which our Lord spoke to Nicodemus, there there is spiritual death. Our Lord said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," and, taught of the Spirit

of the Lord, St. Paul said, "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die." Seeing then that all men are naturally of the flesh, it is plain that all men are naturally in a state of death.

The unconverted man may have the fullest physical or intellectual life. There may be no blight on his bodily powers, the glow of health may be on his cheek, the visible signs of vigour may be present in his well-knit frame, work may bring for him little fatigue, and the burden that presses so heavily on many may rest lightly enough on him. His intellect too may be clear and vigorous, his knowledge full and exact, none of his mental powers exhibiting the least token of feebleness or decay. Yet, however vigorous may be the physical or intellectual life of the unconverted man, his spiritual life is unawakened. The man is spiritually dead. For what is the evidence of life? Is it not activity, is it not the exertion of power? But where is the spiritual activity of the unawakened, unconverted man? Where in any secret recess of his nature will you find the fire of divine love burning? Where are the works of holiness and love that manifest the presence of life? "But," you will say, "unconverted men are often generous, just, truthful, moral." I grant you that many of them are. Yet they are so instinctively only, not from a deep regard to the divine will. And how many of them are otherwise intemperate, cruel, immoral, unjust, untruthful! But the seeming virtues of an unconverted man, when he is none of these things, spring

not out of a true spiritual life. We have seen bands of purple light lingering on the horizon when the sun has gone down ; we have seen blossoms and leaves lingering on a tree whose core a deadly blight has struck. So see we in men, the descendants of beings who once were sinless, some traces of a life that has been, while that life is not yet revived in their souls.

O ! fancy not, my brethren, that spiritual life can come by nature, for to fancy this is to keep yourselves away from the spiritual life that comes by grace. Until the flesh dies you are dead. How can you have life while you are yet unreconciled to God, while yet a yawning gulf severs you from Him ? I accuse you not of sins which are not yours. You may never have sunk into the profoundest depths of sin. If you have there is yet mercy for you ; but, even if you have not, so long as you do not truly know God you are dead in sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh.

II. Let us now consider, in the second place, the condition of believers.

Believers are spiritually alive. The wintry season of death is past with them, and a fresh and healthy life dwells in their souls. " And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him." These words proclaim that even as God raised Christ from the dead, so does He raise or rather, should I say, so has He raised believers with and in Him. Christ's resurrection was the resurrection of

all His people, a resurrection realized by each at his conversion. Faith brings the soul into closest and most vital union with Christ, and to every soul thus brought into union with Christ God gives new and spiritual life. There is for the believer no wide and yawning chasm severing him from God, for the blood of Christ has brought him near. He is no longer in that state of spiritual death which lies in separation from God. His soul is raised from the grave in which it has been lying. Life spiritual and eternal is his sure portion, a portion not merely to be enjoyed hereafter, but actually enjoyed even now. "He that hath the Son of God hath life."

O! how little heed do multitudes give to this great fact of the quickening by God of the spiritually dead, yet how important a fact it is. For to continue in one's natural state of spiritual death here means to be dead through all eternity; while to enjoy that quickening spoken of in our text means to enjoy life for evermore.

"You hath He quickened together with Him." When God raised Christ from the dead He gave the whole Church in and through Him the heritage of spiritual and eternal life. And so soon as a man becomes a believer in Christ, this life becomes his. Christ's own life, His spiritual, glorious resurrection life, stirs in the soul that has hitherto been dead. A mighty change takes place, a change not visible in itself, but only in its consequences to the bodily eye, a change not even, save in its results, discernible to the inner consciousness of the man in whom

it has been wrought, but yet a change of the most glorious significance and destined to affect the whole life. For though consciousness does not reveal the working of the Spirit, or rather should I say the Spirit's actual presence, within man, the Spirit does work on believers, and where He works death gives place to life. And when this life is once established it soon reveals its presence. The whole current of affection sets Godward, the whole course of behaviour becomes different. Sin is forsaken, the flesh is circumcised, crucified, the lips speak pure words, the hands do holy deeds. If a man's previous behaviour has been in gross antagonism to law, it now becomes of a markedly different character, so that light is not more different from darkness than the man is from his old self. And if his previous behaviour has been in the main outwardly correct, there is life put into everything that before was but mechanical and formal. What was before done with no warm emotion, no fervour, is now done from deepest love to God. The heart glows in the sanctuary and the closet, brotherly love springs up in the soul, principle of the highest kind regulates the behaviour, the affections that used to cling to earth, though not to earth's grossest things, are now set on things above. It is possible to make an automaton outwardly resembling man and capable of imitating certain actions of the human body, but it is not possible to give such a thing life. And man may do in his natural state certain things outwardly good in a mechanical way, and as it were

after the manner of an automaton. But he never acts as a living and spiritual being till God quickens him and infuses the divine life into his soul. A man never lives spiritually, and consequently never acts in a true spiritual way, till he is converted. But conversion is quickening, resurrection. We are not wholly unacquainted with resurrection in certain visible forms. We see something of a resurrection every spring, when, where flowers have died, fresh flowers burst into life and bloom. The day is coming too when there will be a bodily resurrection of the dead, when the sleepers in the dust shall come forth to new life and when the sea will give up its dead. But day by day a real, although invisible, resurrection is going on. Day by day men are being converted, and conversion means the soul's awaking from spiritual death, its rising from a veritable grave of sin, in which it has been buried, to a life of holiness.

III. Let us now consider, in the third and last place, the work of God which He wrought once for all through Christ, and which made the condition of believers, about which we have been speaking, possible.

It is easy to see, I think, that before the sinner can be quickened he must be pardoned. Forgiveness of sin must prepare the way for spiritual life. Before God can quicken He must forgive. We surely cannot conceive a man being a sharer in Christ's life, while yet the whole burden of his past sin clings to him. Now, our text tells us that to

prepare the way for the bestowing of spiritual life, God forgave all the iniquities of His people, blotting out the handwriting of ordinances which was against them, which was contrary to them, and taking it out of the way and nailing it to the cross.

It is plain from the connection of the words, "having forgiven," with the words which follow that in our text St. Paul is not speaking of the personal or individual forgiveness which each converted sinner receives at his conversion, except in so far as that forgiveness is embraced in a wider one. He is speaking of the great forgiving work done once for all at Calvary, of the blotting out of all sin there. In laying the sins of men on His Son God actually and once for all forgave all the sins of all believers, so that when a man believes he enters on the enjoyment of a great general pardon already extended to all believers, although of course it only becomes a particular pardon for him on his acceptance of it. When the head of a nation, part of which has been in rebellion, proclaims a general indemnity for all who will lay down their arms, each rebel who submits only partakes of the benefit of the indemnity at his submission, but he is really partaking, not of a pardon only granted then, but of a pardon granted before. Even so, when a sinner repents and believes, he partakes of a pardon actually granted and, as it were, proclaimed at the cross. God forgave the sins of believers when He laid these sins on Christ. And mark how full the forgiveness was. Our text expressly states that not

some sins only, but all sins were forgiven. God retains not the memory of any sin against those whom He pardons, but freely forgives all the transgressions which they have done.

And while our text proclaims the fulness and completeness of the divine forgiveness, it exhibits clearly the method of God's working out of this forgiveness, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances which was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross."

Now these words, in their narrowest signification, point to the abolition of the ceremonial law at the death of Christ. The main thing in that ceremonial law was circumcision. It was the great sign of the covenant between God and Abraham, that covenant which extended to the whole Jewish people. To be uncircumcised was therefore to be excluded from many spiritual privileges, and the Gentiles, being in uncircumcision, were out of the Church of God. They could only come into the possession of full spiritual privileges during the old Jewish dispensation by being circumcised and conforming to the whole ceremonial law. We may say, therefore, that the ceremonial law was against the Gentiles, was contrary to the Gentiles, stood between them and spiritual privileges. But God blotted out the handwriting of ordinances which was against the Gentiles, took it out of the way of their entrance into the full possession of spiritual privileges, nailing it to the cross of Christ, that there, as it

were, it might be rent and destroyed. God broke down at the cross the middle wall of partition which severed Jew from Gentile, and thus made the Gentiles free of every spiritual privilege which before had been confined to the Jews. They therefore, in the early Christian Church, who sought to make it compulsory that the Gentiles should be circumcised, were re-raising a barrier which God himself had broken down.

But in fact the ceremonial law, the handwriting of ordinances that was against, that was contrary to, the Gentiles, was against, was contrary to, the Jews themselves. St. Paul, himself a Jew, says, "The handwriting of ordinances which was against us, which was contrary to us." The ceremonial law, with its washings and purifications, its fasts and sacrifices, was simply an acknowledgment of guilt. Its washings could not purify the soul, its sacrifices could not save. These things did, indeed, point to Christ, but in themselves they were simply confessions of guilt. Now, when God at Christ's death abolished the ceremonial law, blotted out the handwriting of ordinances, He took out of the way that which was against the Jews themselves. He cancelled, as it were, the standing record of their guilt, that He might freely bestow forgiveness upon them.

But while our text, in its strictest and narrowest significance, refers only to the removal of the ceremonial law at the death of our Lord, it certainly cannot be held as referring to that alone. Now,

conformity to the Jewish ceremonial law was not the great barrier to the justification of the Gentiles, any more than mere outward conformity to it was the justification of the Jews. The whole law, moral and ceremonial, was against both Jews and Gentiles, inasmuch as both Jews and Gentiles were law-breakers, and could therefore have no justification through the law. The whole law was a handwriting against man, whether it was written in stone or on human hearts. It was an unfulfilled bond, bearing constant testimony against man, and speaking plainly of his condemnation. What did God do with this bond, then? He obliterated it, took it away, nailed it to the cross. A French writer has said, with no less truth than beauty, that God obliterated the handwriting which was against us with the blood of Christ, and then tore the unfulfilled bond to pieces with the nails of the cross. As the instrument of condemnation the law was nailed to the cross and thus, as it were, destroyed. The moral law remains, certainly a guide for us in regard to Christian life, but in so far as the law accuses and condemns it is abrogated for all believers. When Christ was nailed to the cross, the law, as the instrument of condemnation, was nailed to the cross, and thus its curse was taken away. And the accusing law, being nailed to the cross, pardon and justification became possible for men.

Who is there, then, that would not glory in the cross, when through it so mighty work was

wrought for man? Who would seek salvation from the works of the law when, through the nailing of that law to the cross, salvation without the works of the law became possible for man?

Ye who are mourning over a broken law, turn to the cross for safety? There you are secure. The law has no thunders there. For Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, and if we put our trust in Him we are eternally safe.

XVII.

“And, having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”—Colossians ii., 15.

ST. PAUL, it is thought by many, witnessed a Roman triumph during the time that he was a prisoner in Rome. Certainly one Roman General had a triumph decreed to him about the time of the Apostle’s imprisonment, and St. Paul’s lodging may have been in that part of the city through which the triumphal procession passed. But even if the Apostle did not actually witness a Roman triumph he could not have been ignorant as to what the characteristics of such a triumph were. For two whole years Roman soldiers were his constant companions. Guardsman relieved guardsman in the duty of watching over the Apostle, and from these soldiers, who came and went at their appointed hours, he learned those details of the military life of which he made so striking use by way of illustration in his Epistles. He knew assuredly what a great triumph was, knew of the long procession of soldiers, clad in their best array, of the splendid chariot of the victorious commander, of the spoils of war so proudly exhibited, of the captives led along in the

victor's train. Is it such a triumph that he has in his mind when he says, "Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly?" Does he think of Christ on the cross and in His ascension as a conqueror in his triumph, openly shewing Satan and the powers of darkness as conquered and captive? Assuredly our Lord did triumph over Satan and his legions on the cross, and from it, as from a conqueror's triumphal car, made manifest His victory over them. Assuredly too the thought of a triumph was in the Apostle's mind when he used the words, "Made a shew of them openly." Yet I do not think that it was mainly of Christ's triumph over the powers of darkness that the Apostle was thinking when he wrote our text. He was mainly thinking, I believe, of God's showing of the superiority of our Lord to all angelic beings whatever. You will observe by a careful reading of our text, in connection with the context, that it is not our Saviour, but God, the Father, who is spoken of as having made a shew openly of principalities and powers. In the twelfth verse God is said to have raised Christ from the dead, and in the thirteenth verse He is said to have quickened us together with Christ. In the fourteenth verse God is said to have nailed the handwriting of ordinances that was against us to the cross of Christ, and in our text surely it is still the doing of God that is spoken of. And what our text says about the doing of God is practically this, that He made Christ triumph over all principalities

and powers as their head, manifested Him as glorious above them all. We get at the meaning of our text most readily by reading it as it is given in the revised version, although even there it is not quite accurately rendered. "Having put off from Himself the principalities and the powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it." In truth, our text is not an easy one, and no two translators have rendered it exactly in the same way. But the revised version is at least partly right, for it says that the principalities and powers were not spoiled, but put off, indicating thus that God put aside, as it were, His very angels that He might magnify His Son. The thought of our text, when the text itself is rightly understood, is much akin to that which we have in the third and fourth verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "Who, when He had Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." Our text teaches that God has manifested Christ as higher than all angels. He has not only given to Him to triumph over the powers of darkness, but has set Him far above all the angels of light. "He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."

Regarding our text, then, as setting before us

not so much Christ's victory over the powers of darkness and evil as His superiority even to the angels of light, let us consider, in the first place, God's putting off of the principalities and powers, and in the second place, God's making a shew of these principalities openly, and triumphing over them in Christ.

I. Let us consider, in the first place, God's putting off of principalities and powers.

"Having spoiled principalities and powers," we read in our authorised version, but in the revised version we read, "Having put off from Himself the principalities and the powers."

Perhaps it may seem to you that the old rendering is better than the new, that the spoiling of principalities and powers is a more intelligible thing than the putting of them off. You can understand, you may say, how the principalities and powers that were antagonistic to man were vanquished and stripped of their spoils when our Lord died on the cross. These principalities and powers had made men their captives, their slaves. Satan had become in a sadly true sense the Prince of this World, but the death of Christ had broken the power of Satan and secured the redemption of man. Men had become the spoils of the powers of darkness, and the redemption of man was the spoiling of these powers. Now, you may say, all this is very intelligible, but the putting off of principalities is far from so easy a matter to understand. Let me answer that the one thing

is as intelligible as the other when we give due consideration to Scripture teaching about the ministry of angels. We must remember that in the Jewish beliefs regarding such great matters as the giving forth of the law on Mount Sinai, the ministry of angels was very fully recognised. We do not, indeed, find it recorded in the Book of Exodus that there were angels on the Mount when the law was given forth, but we read in Deuteronomy, "The Lord came from Sinai, . . . and He came with ten thousands of saints." Then we find St. Stephen, just before his martyrdom, bearing testimony to the universal belief that these messengers of God were present at Sinai as intermediaries, when he says, "Ye, . . . who have received the law by the disposition of angels." And this thought of the mediation of angels, to which St. Stephen gave expression just before his martyrdom, had been expressed long before in the sixty-eighth Psalm (Ps. lxxviii., 17). "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place." And what is expressed in this old Psalm is expressed again in two New Testament Epistles. We read in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrews ii., 2), "For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, . . . how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord?" And in the Epistle to the Galatians we find the words, "Wherfore, then, serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed

should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator." It is then the plain teaching both of the Old Testament and the New that God employed His angels in some way in connection with the giving forth of the law at Mount Sinai. Nor are there wanting passages that tell us of the ministrations of the holy angels time and again, when some high purpose of God had to be fulfilled. Think then of all that Scripture says about the angels of God, "that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word," the hosts of God, "ministers of His that do His pleasure," and the meaning of the words, "Having put off from Himself the principalities and the powers," will cease to be obscure to you. It is just this, that in all that prepared for and led up to the accomplishing of man's redemption the angels were employed, but when that great work was to be accomplished the angels were put off, put away. When men's trespasses were to be forgiven, when the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, was to be taken out of the way, and nailed to the cross, it was not His angels, but His Son, whom God sent. Angels ministered to our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane in the hour of His terrible agony. We read in the Gospel according to St. Luke (xxii., 43), "There appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him." Angels, all unseen of those that stood around the cross, may have been

witnesses of the stedfast sufferings of our Saviour.

“Ride on, ride on in majesty;
The winged squadrons of the sky
Look down with sad and wondering eyes
To see the approaching sacrifice.”

—Yet in that work which was accomplished on the cross no highest angel even took part. The angels were put aside, that the Son of God might suffer for us. I have no desire, my brethren, to intrude into those things which I have not seen, but I think I may say without undue boldness that no angel could have saved us. And assuredly no angel did save us. The angels might be, nay, doubtless were, desirous of our salvation, but that salvation was accomplished without mediation of theirs. Our Lord was alone in the hour of His sorrow, alone because His disciples had forsaken Him, and because no man could enter into His awful experiences in that hour. But He was alone in another sense, in the sense that purely by Himself He accomplished our salvation. The angels had ministered to men in the past, had brought the divine Word to them, had strengthened and guided them. But no angel suffered for them, no angel endured for them the cross and passion. It was one higher than all angels that, having wrapped Himself in a garment of flesh, bore men’s sins in His own body on the tree. There are kindly offices in regard to our own which we may have at times to depute to others, resting satisfied with the knowledge that these offices are performed. There are others, however,

which we feel we must do ourselves. The mother whose child is in sore sickness and imminent danger must with her own hands smooth the pillow and lift the weary little head. And when God would help His helpless children in their deepest and sorest need, He came to them in the person of His Son, in the person of that Son as He suffered on the cross. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself."

There were those at Colossae who sought, at least there was one there who sought, to induce the Colossian Christians to pay special homage to angels. St. Paul claimed the homage of all for Christ, and claimed it on the ground that not angels, but Christ, had suffered for men. The angels are worthy of respect, such respect as we pay to men of great wisdom and fervent piety. But worship is due to God alone and to Him in Whom God came for our salvation. Angels had to stand aside when our salvation was to be accomplished. Even they, although they excel in strength, could not accomplish that. That was His work, whom all the angels of God are called to worship, and whose throne is for ever and ever. And in the very fact that the angels had to be put aside when man's salvation was to be accomplished, we have testimony to the super-eminent glory of Christ.

My brethren, the thought that the very angels were put aside when our salvation was wrought out is a very impressive one, and a very suggestive one.

It is a thought suggestive surely of the further thought that God is very gracious and very compassionate. If man's salvation was a task too great for even the heavenly principalities and powers, the very angels of God themselves, and if God put them all aside and sent His own Son, or rather, as we should say, came in the person of His Son to save men, then how rich must be His mercy, how great His fatherly compassion! An inspired Apostle has told us that God is love, and we feel how true his utterance is when we think of the sacrifice of the cross. The thought of God's goodness comes to us as we look forth on the world, fair with the bright beauty of early summer, comes to us as we gaze on the fields waving with autumnal fulness, comes to us amid the sweetness of home life, comes to us as we enjoy the gladness of human friendships. But then only do we see aright what the fatherly love of God means, when we look on the incarnate Christ, the very Son of God wearing our nature, bearing our burdens, dying and triumphing over death for us. When St. Paul wrote the words of our text he was not dealing with a matter of speculative interest only. He was setting forth a truth of most blessed import, a truth fitted to cheer us all, the truth of God's love for us, and personal interest in us, the truth that, when He sent not angels, but His very Son, to bring to us salvation, He showed that the most fallen are still not beyond His care.

Further, if the thought that the very angels

were put aside, and God's own Son sent, when our salvation was to be accomplished, is suggestive of the love of God to us, is it not also suggestive of the great value of the human soul? Alas! too often we think very lightly of the value of the soul, whether that of our brother or our own. We are concerned about our temporal well-being; nay, if we are in accord with the spirit of the age, we are concerned more or less about the temporal well-being of others. But salvation for time and eternity! the salvation of ourselves and of our brethren, does that interest us as it ought to do? In too many cases I fear not, my brethren. Yet, how deep should be our interest in that which was of so supreme interest to God, that soul which He sent, not angels, but His Son, to save.

II. We have now to consider, in the second place, God's making a shew openly of the principalities and powers and triumphing over them in Christ.

“And having spoiled principalities and powers He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”

If we follow the authorised version of Scripture, and in consequence regard the principalities and powers as the powers of darkness whom Christ stripped of their spoils by dying for men on the cross, then we must regard the open shew of these principalities and powers as such a display of them as the Roman conqueror made of the captives taken in war. These captives were led in sad procession

after the victor's car of triumph to be to all observers a token of the greatness of the victory which he had won. Now, if we understand our text as it is often understood, it teaches that Christ on the very cross itself displayed the powers of darkness as vanquished and despoiled. That He did so display them is beyond question. The cross was, we may truly say, the supreme trial of our Lord. It stood in a very true sense between Him and man's salvation. The cup of pain and shame which He had to drink there was indeed a bitter cup, and we marvel not that in a very agony of prayer He had to brace Himself for the drinking of it. The cross was indeed the destined instrument of man's salvation, but it was also that by which Satan strove to hinder man's salvation from being accomplished. When, then, our Lord, instead of turning away from the cross, patiently endured it, He surely displayed Satan as a beaten antagonist. And as, through the ages, the cross has drawn men to Christ, it has been the means of shewing Satan as a vanquished foe, a foe over whom our Lord has triumphed and is triumphing.

While, however, it is absolutely true that Christ has made a shew openly of the principalities and powers of darkness, triumphing over them in His cross, that is not exactly the truth which our text, rightly understood, teaches. What it does teach is that God made an open manifestation of the subjection of the holy angels themselves to Christ. The open show which was made of the

principalities and powers, principalities and powers in our text not of darkness, but of light, was not dishonouring to them, but was specially honouring to our Lord. When not they, but He, accomplished men's salvation, when He did for man what they could not do for him, then surely they were shewn to be inferior to Him, and graced His triumph as their inferiority was shewn. The highest position which one can hold is the position of saviour, and this position was held, not by the angels, not by highest archangel even, but by Christ our Lord. And although the holy angels were not triumphed over in the sense in which the powers of darkness were triumphed over, still they, as it were, but graced the divine triumph as subject to Him who had accomplished all by Himself. It was God himself who triumphed in the person of His Son. We should read the last words of our text, "Triumphing over them in Him, that is, in Christ," not "triumphing over them in it." It is quite true that it was through the cross that Christ triumphed, but the great truth taught in our text is that in the death of Christ there was a triumphant manifestation of the divine power and grace. In another of his Epistles, St. Paul says, "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ." And in keeping with that utterance he says in our text that God, in quickening us together with Christ, forgiving us all our trespasses, blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, and nailing that handwriting to the cross, has

triumphed in Christ. It matters little indeed whether we say that God has triumphed or that Christ has triumphed, if only we remember that the whole work of human salvation is a divine work. It did not originate with the angels, and it was not carried out by angelic ministrations. It took its origin in the pitying love of God, and it was accomplished through the coming in the flesh of His Son to die for men. And when the work had been accomplished, the glory lay, not with the angels, but with Him who had accomplished it, and with the Father from Whom He had come forth.

I close, my brethren, by claiming your homage, devotion and trust for Christ. Here, as everywhere throughout his Epistle to the Colossians, St. Paul is eager to set forth Christ as divinely glorious and savingly gracious. Christ is higher than all angels, and He has done for us what no angel could have done. He, the very son of God, has by His own death purchased our salvation. Now, we may not be inclined, as some in early days were, as many in all times have been, to a worshipping of angels, but, alas! we may be too easily led to forget the unspeakable claims which Christ has upon us. O! let us strive to remember that God put the very angels aside and sent His Son to die for us, and that the Son came and by His death wrought for us deliverance. And, as we remember this, let us cling to Christ with constant faith, that we too may grace His triumph, the triumph of divine and everlasting love.

XVIII.

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days : which are a shadow of things to come : but the body is of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind. And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances (touch not ; taste not ; handle not ; which all are to perish with the using ;) after the commandments and doctrines of men ? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body : not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.”—Colossians ii., 16-23.

THE fact that our Lord Jesus Christ has made a full atonement for us is not the only one to which our text has reference, but it is, I think, the leading one. Now this fact does not free us from the necessity of seeking to live in holiness, but it does render it vain for us to trust in legal observances, and angelic mediators, and fastings, and such like practices. If a sufficient atonement has been made for us, and such has been made, we but make light of that atonement if we insist that there are other things without due attention to which we cannot be saved. Yet men have ever been ready to think that something more is necessary for their salvation than simple trust in Christ. In Colossae there was at least a danger that the converts would come to think that something else was necessary, for some one had come thither teaching what he claimed to

be a more enlightened doctrine than that of the first preachers who had visited the Phrygian city, and it was far from impossible that some might listen to him. It is the teaching of this man that St. Paul refers to in our text, and which he counsels the Colossian Christians not to listen to. But it is in no spirit of petty jealousy that the Apostle writes. If he is jealous he is only jealous for his Master. He wants Christ to be everything to those that had professed themselves His in Colossae. There were three things, it would seem, that were set forth as necessary by the strange teacher at Colossae. These were Mosaic observances, invocation of angels, and severe treatment of the body. St. Paul teaches that to insist on these is to take away from the sufficiency of Christ as mediator. He teaches more than this, no doubt. He teaches that to insist on the worshipping of angels is to take away from the dignity of Christ as Head of the Church. He teaches too, I think, that to concern oneself about meats and days and bodily austerities is unworthy, inasmuch as Christ has lifted His people to a life in which these are trivialities. Yet, looking to the context, we see that the great thing, after all, that St. Paul does teach is that Christ has died for us, making for us a full atonement, and that therefore we greatly err if we seek other grounds of acceptance with God than the sacrifice and mediation of our Saviour. In considering our text, therefore, we shall strive to keep in view that they for whom Christ died need no other plea than His sacrifice of

Himself for them to ensure their acceptance with God, while we shall not forget that He is the Church's risen and glorious Head to Whom His people's constant homage is due, and also that He has brought the whole body of His people into a condition, as it were, of full manhood, a condition very different from that of the Jewish Church, which was, so to speak, but a Church in its childhood, and demands of them that they shall put away childish things.

Keeping these things in view, we shall consider, in the first place, the Apostle's counsel regarding ceremonial observances; in the second place, his counsel regarding angel worship, and, in the last place, his counsel regarding bodily austerities.

I. Let us consider, in the first place, St. Paul's counsel regarding ceremonial observances.

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat or drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come: but the body is of Christ.”

The force of these words is simply this, that under Christianity we are entirely free from all those ordinances regarding meats and sacred seasons which were binding on the Jews before the coming of Christ. It was not an easy matter for even Christian Jews in the first days of Christianity to cease from observing these ordinances, and, as a matter of fact, few, if any of them, did so. Nor can we greatly blame them. It is not an easy matter for any of us to change from the ways of worship in which we have been brought up, and it

was peculiarly difficult surely for the Jew to cease from observances which had so great an antiquity and so high an authority to recommend them. No, we can hardly blame the Christian Jew for his personal attachment to his old religious observances. But there were many Christian Jews, who, not content with clinging to the old Mosaic ceremonies themselves, wished to impose these on Gentile Christians also. It was against their effort to do this that St. Paul contended so strongly. The Mosaic ordinances, he said, were but shadows of things to come, and the shadows were of no moment when men had the body, the reality. They had Christ; what need had they for those ordinances that had but foreshadowed His coming? Distinctions of meats and days had, indeed, been useful in preparing men's minds for higher things. They had taught some, at least, though only by figures, that God demands of His servants purity within, and a due recognition of life's sacredness, and, as teaching the necessity of a pure and consecrated life, had helped men to a conception of what the coming kingdom was to be. But the value of the Mosaic ordinances lay only in their foreshadowing of the spiritual purity of the coming kingdom. And if this was their whole value, it was surely a vain thing to insist on their being observed when the kingdom had actually come. When that kingdom had come it was surely enough to point men to Christ, and bid them learn from Him how pure and full of consecration life should be. It may indeed

appear to some that St. Paul was somewhat too eager in his contention against those who were anxious that Gentiles should observe the distinctions of meats and days which Jews observed. What harm would it have been, some may ask, had the Gentile Christians abstained from some kinds of meat, and observed some of the Jewish sacred days? Do not men abstain from certain kinds of food and drink from choice, and is it not natural to regard some days as sacred? Well, St. Paul would have found little fault with any one for what he ate or did not eat, or even with his motives in eating or not eating, and he accorded full liberty to every man to keep sacred what days he chose. But what he strenuously resisted was the insistence by some that others should observe the rules about meats and days which they themselves observed, and their raising the observance of these rules into a high religious duty. He knew full well that when men made very much of outward observances they are both ready to trust to these for acceptance with God and apt to be less regardful of personal piety, and hence he deemed it his duty to contend against those who gave a high religious value to rules about meats and days. To him all these rules seemed to come between the soul and Christ, and to obscure its vision of Him. What he wished men to do was not to enslave themselves to ceremonies, but to trust in the Saviour for acceptance with God and to follow as free men the example of Christ.

But, it may be urged by some, who are quite in

accord with the Apostle, that no one should judge another in meat or drink, St. Paul surely cannot mean that all days, like all meats, may be regarded as the same. Surely, it may be urged, the Lord's Day is different from all other days, and St. Paul cannot have meant to include it among the days regarding which he says that we are to let no man judge us. Well, my brethren, St. Paul is assuredly speaking in our text of the Jewish Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, and counting it, with new moons and other sacred seasons of the Jews, among the shadows that have ceased to have an obligation for Christian people. And assuredly also, as I have already said, he accorded every man full liberty to regard any day as a day to be specially kept apart for worship and meditation. But St. Paul actually lays down no rule regarding the Lord's Day itself, but leaves it to every man's own conscience to decide how the day is to be observed. But do not fancy that the Apostle meant that Christians could make the Lord's Day common. Rather did he wish them to make every day sacred, to bring up every day to the level of the Lord's Day. He dreaded lest men should, as I may express it, keep one day for religion and give all the rest to the world, should isolate one day weekly for certain religious observances and make a virtue of doing so. For my own part, my brethren, I would not wish the Lord's Day kept otherwise than we have been wont to keep it. I do love the peace and rest and sweet Christian communion of the first day of the week.

But, I ask you, is it a right thing for men to make much, from a religious point of view, of one day, and little, from the same point of view, of other days? Should not every day be with us a day of prayer and communion with God, and holy living? We are, no doubt, all influenced by the associations that cluster round certain places and certain days, and the Lord's House and the Lord's Day will naturally link themselves with our holiest thoughts and most devout aspirations. But we are then only living true Christian lives when we recognise all seasons as sacred, when we count every day as a day to be given to God. This, I think, was what St. Paul meant when he said, "Let no man judge you in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days." It was to guard men from mere ceremonialism, and to lead them to live out daily a Christ-like life that he wrote these words.

My brethren, let us take all that the Apostle says about distinctions of meats and days as teaching us the vanity of all mere outward observances when compared with a devout daily following of Christ. The spirit which led the to us unknown teacher or teachers at Colossae to insist on clinging to the ceremonial practices and sacred days of Judaism is still abroad. We are still urged by some and may be inclined ourselves to pay great heed to the formalities of worship and to the keeping of times and seasons as specially sacred. Well, let us not, in our care about this and that form, forget the substance, and in our attention to this and that day, forget that every day

should be devoted to God. To walk every day with Christ, to attain daily a fuller likeness to Him, to be in the world the same pious men and women that we are in the house of prayer on the Lord's Day, that is the great matter. All forms are of inferior importance, faith in the crucified Redeemer and likeness to Him are the things of surpassing moment.

II. We now consider, in the second place, St. Paul's counsel regarding angel worship.

His words are, "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God."

The reward or prize of which the Apostle speaks is not the reward of human merit, but what may be called the reward of grace. It is the end to which faith looks forward, the full and final salvation of the soul. And St. Paul pointed out to the converts in Colossae that there was a danger lest they might lose this prize. For there was one among them who was seeking to turn them away from Christ, not perhaps by actually saying that it was vain to trust in Him, but by putting Him at a distance from them, and by calling them to trust in angelic mediators. This man seems to have appealed to a very beautiful Christian feeling in order to carry out his ends. There is nothing that is more beautiful than humility, and assuredly, until

one does humble himself to receive salvation as God's free gift, he cannot be saved. And this new teacher sought to move men through a right feeling to do a wrong thing. Humility is beautiful and becoming. We can conceive him as having said:— Do you, to shew your humility, turn not directly to Christ, but to angel mediators. Worship them, and through them be saved. It was specious enough teaching, but false teaching still, for it was teaching that put Christ far away. The true teaching is that which brings Christ near, which sets Him forth as the Head in close and vital union with the Church which is His body. It was not indeed humility on his own part which led this strange teacher to call the Colossians to the worshipping of angels, it was not humility, but a foolish pride in his own superior insight. Yet he appealed, as I have said, to a very worthy Christian feeling, although he appealed wrongly, and he might have beguiled men who really wished to show themselves humble. But we need no angelic mediators. Through all the Christian ages there have been those who have been ready to appeal to saints and angels, and who have done so because they felt as if they dared not come directly to Christ. But the humility which keeps us away from Christ is a vain and misplaced humility. It was Christ that took our manhood on Him to suffer and die for us, it is Christ from Whom we draw our life, and we need no one to plead our cause with Him, the gracious Saviour, Lord of all indeed, but still our Brother and Friend.

It is not needful, my brethren, that I should use many words to warn you against trusting to angelic mediators. Our protestant faith has at least freed us from the danger of doing that. But it is needful that I should urge you to be sure that you cling to Christ. A man may know that saintly and angelic mediators cannot save him, and yet remain unsaved. He may place a kind of vague faith in the Church's prayers, or in the prayers of friends, and not personally turn to the Saviour. Yet it is only by a personal turning to Christ that one can be saved. See then that you cling to Christ, that, saved by His death for you, you may live your lives in Him.

III. Let us now consider, in the third place, St. Paul's counsel regarding bodily austerities.

His words are, "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ to the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances (touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body: not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh."

Perhaps in these words there is a certain allusion to the matters referred to in the first part of our text, to the meats and drinks in which the Apostle tells us we should let no man judge us. But the mention of the neglecting of the body leads us to see that the main reference is to the practice of bodily austerities, the mortification, not of sinful

desires, but of the mere physical frame. It has been a far from uncommon thought among men that there is a certain virtue in afflicting the body, in subjecting it to hunger or nakedness. In all ages and under all creeds there have been those who have believed this, and plainly there was some one at Colossae who enjoined the practice of bodily austerities as something of supreme value. St. Paul regarded these ascetic rules, "Touch not, taste not, handle not," as mere will worship. No doubt a man must keep his bodily appetites in due control, must not give himself to excess either in eating or drinking; but it is one thing to keep the body in due restraint, and quite another thing to afflict it, and to think that in the afflicting of it one is doing something for his soul's good. To touch not, to taste not, to handle not things which perish with the using, to abstain, that is, from mere ordinary food, in the thought that thereby one is doing a religious duty, is surely a delusion. Such affliction of the body is not a mortification of the flesh, a crucifying of its affections and lusts. It may indeed sometimes satisfy the flesh in the sense of ministering to its pride, the man that has voluntarily afflicted himself deeming that he has done a peculiarly meritorious work. But, as the revised version well puts it, it is not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh. It does not help a man to overcome one unholy desire, to subdue one evil passion. Men are ever eager to find out some way of their own for winning the

divine favour, or for perfecting their spiritual life. They are eager to do something which is not demanded of them, in order to shew, as it were, a superior merit on their part. Yet, what God does require of men is not that they multiply ceremonies, and not that they afflict their bodies, but that they cling to His son, whom He has sent to save them, and walk in newness of life. “Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?” My brethren, self-appointed austerities, afflictions of the body, are but rudiments of the world, things childish and vain. The true mortification of the flesh comes through death with Christ. Let us be in very truth one with Christ and we die with Him to the power of sin.

The sum and substance of the teaching of our text is just that we put nothing in the place of Christ. Let us take heed that we cling close to Him. We may not be ready to fall into some of the errors alluded to in our text. We may not be likely to think of angelic mediators, or to look to save ourselves by bodily austerities. Yet, we may be ready to build too much on our attention to outward acts of worship, alas! too ready to forget that we need a Saviour. Let us give Jesus the place which St. Paul gave Him; let Him be to us our Saviour, Pattern, Head. “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”

XIX.

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."—Colossians iii., 1-2.

THE doctrine of the union of believers with Christ is a most mysterious doctrine. It is, however, one of the most prominent doctrines of Scripture, a doctrine that either explicitly or implicitly is set forth in almost every page of the New Testament. It is plainly enough a doctrine implied in our text, for unless there be union with Christ there cannot be resurrection with Him. The resurrection spoken of in our text is not, in so far as those addressed are concerned, bodily resurrection, but mystical and spiritual resurrection, resurrection to religious life. Of course the mystical or spiritual resurrection of believers with Christ is an earnest of their bodily resurrection, and it is in consequence of its being so that believers are so earnestly urged to seek the things above, things which at their resurrection they will very abundantly enjoy; but still it is not of the bodily resurrection that our text speaks chiefly. It speaks chiefly of a present, not of a future resurrection, a resurrection in this life. Such a resurrection, it says, the believer passes through, because he is with, that is, because he is in, Christ.

Our text, in short, represents the believer as sharing in Christ's resurrection, and in so doing unquestionably represents him as united to Christ.

Although, however, the grand scriptural doctrine of the believer's vital and organic union with Christ is, most unquestionably, the doctrine of our text, it is not requisite that in meditating on our text we should dwell solely, or even mostly, on that doctrine. That doctrine will certainly fall particularly under our notice in one part of our discourse, but our text demands our attention to duties even more than to doctrines. You observe that in our text there is a command given to us in the words, "Seek those things which are above," and "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth," and a sanction for this command in the words, "If ye then be risen with Christ," and "Where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God."

Let us devote our attention, in the first place, to the command, and, in the second place, to the grounds on which that command is given.

I. Let us consider, in the first place, the commandment of our text.

We read, "Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at God's right hand," and again, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Most suitable is the command, my dear brethren, for to set the affections on things on the earth is only the too common tendency of men.

Is there not displayed by some a tendency to

set their affections on earth's sins and follies, by others a tendency to set their affections on earth's pleasures, by others a tendency to set their affections on earth's titles and honours, by others a tendency to set their affections on life's friendships, by others a tendency to make their very religion earthly? And are there not multitudes that not only display a tendency to set their affections on things on earth, but that actually do so? It is nothing to them that their souls are fitted for loftier things, that their aspirations are sometimes aspirations after what is lofty and good: they restrain their souls, they crush their aspirations. The eagle has strong pinions whereon he may soar to lofty heights, gazing as he mounts upwards, with piercing eye on the sun. How strange would it be then if he would always delight to haunt the dull and dark hollows, to fold his wings idly and content himself to remain a creature of the field. Yet, how many men there are that, although they could mount up on wings as eagles, are contented to grovel. They love the earth, they will not put forth their powers for noble ends, they will not nurture and cherish heavenly aspirations.

Some there are that love things positively sinful. To them no joys are like the joys of sin. One man delights in lying, takes a positive pleasure in speaking false words, and specially in spreading false reports regarding others. Another man has a perfect passion for revenge, for hunting down every one that has done him some little real or fancied

injury. Another man is dishonest. Eager for his own comforts and enjoyments, he makes himself comfortable at the expense of his neighbours. Another man loves unchaste pleasures, and still another delights himself in intemperance. But time would fail us to speak at length regarding the pleasure which multitudes take in things that are in every degree and in every sense wicked, that fix their affections on the vilest things on earth. This only must we remember, that multitudes do so. There are others again that, although they do not so fervently follow things absolutely sinful and vile, still are too much taken up with the foolish and giddy pleasures of this world. They live for amusement alone. Mark you, I am not condemning harmless recreation, I am not saying that men can live without amusement; but I do aver that many persons pursue amusement to a criminal extent, give themselves, so far as their circumstances will permit, to a life of giddiest folly, of sheerest trifling.

Then again, how many are there that are slaves of worldly ambition, that set their whole affections on the world's titles and honours! The glories of heaven are nothing to them, they are not occupied with thoughts about crowns and thrones in heaven: they can think of nothing but earth's glories, live for nothing but them, bend their energies on nothing but on winning, mayhap not always in the most honourable way, titles and fame. What vast multitudes are there again that are fearfully eager

to obtain worldly riches! Worldliness has never been uncommon, and it is, I can hardly help thinking, the crowning and crying sin of the present day. The glitter of gold blinds the eyes of millions to the glories of heaven; the love of gold eats, like a canker, nobler feelings and holy aspirations out of millions of hearts. There used to be old fables of men selling their souls for gold. The fables were only in form false, in matter they were true.

And, further, how many are there that make too much of human friendships! Nothing is more beautiful than sincere and holy friendships; and yet there are friendships that are most ruinous. There are friendships quite unworthy of the name, friendships that are only friendships in sin, friendships that ruin the soul. And O! how common are these friendships! how many persons are there that, for the sake of earthly friends, refuse to give their hearts to God!

Then are there not those that make their very religion earthly, a thing of forms and ceremonies and mere ascetic regulations? Was not this the very thing that St. Paul feared the Colossians might do?

When, then, on looking around us, we find that there are so vast multitudes whose affections are set on earth, and when we find that all are tempted to fix their affections on it, it need not surprise us that the Apostle should so earnestly urge us to set our affections on things above. He gives us a twofold commandment, a commandment to seek those things which are above, a commandment to

set our affections on things above. Now, what is the full force of his commandment?

It is a commandment to fix our thoughts and affections on things above, on things in heaven, and a command to bend all the strength of our efforts on the attainment of these things. It is a commandment to wish, to pray, and to strive for the things of heaven. It is not of course a commandment utterly to neglect the things of earth. For the things of earth we must have some measure of care. We cannot, must not, utterly neglect these things. We must labour to have our necessities supplied, must shew a proper measure of diligence and prudence in business, and we must seek for our bodies and minds, exhausted by toil, a moderate measure of recreation. But still our thoughts are not to be thoughts of earth and the things of earth solely, or even chiefly. They are to be mainly thoughts of heaven. And our efforts are to be efforts after heavenly things.

We must make our religion deep and spiritual, not formal merely, and therefore earthly. We must desire, pray for and strive after, the friendship of God and of Christ. Surely the setting of our affection on things above means the setting of it on God and our Risen Saviour. It is the crowning glory and joy of heaven that there the Christian will be with God and with Christ. The Apostle, desirous of perfecting his picture of heaven's felicity, says, "The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it." Most imperative then is it that we should

desire to have as far as possible here, and to enjoy for ever in perfect fulness hereafter, the friendship of God and of Christ. If we come short of desiring that we are but minding earthly things.

Further, we must desire, pray for, and strive after, the crown of life, and the glories of heaven. Men pant for fading glory and for riches that take to themselves wings and flee away. They endure great hardships to attain power, honour, or wealth. But how valueless are the things which they seek compared with the things that are where Christ sitteth at God's right hand. There there are treasures that cannot be destroyed or stolen, a crown that cannot fade or be torn from the brow, honours that cannot grow less. Christ Himself enjoys, as mediator, an exalted kingdom, lofty honours, fadeless possessions, and He has kingdoms and honours to bestow, kingdoms and honours, not of an earthly type, but spiritual and blessed. We must, therefore, believing the eternal glories and riches of heaven, its peace, its joy, its gladness, its spiritual glory, to be infinitely preferable to anything that earth can give, make the attainment of these honours and glories the aim of our heartiest wishes and prayers, the object of our most persistent and hearty efforts. Moreover, we must, in our seeking and setting our affections on things above, seek and set our affections on holiness, purity of heart and life. We cannot read Scripture with any measure of care without noting how thoroughly it teaches that heaven is characterized by holiness. "Holiness

becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever," saith the psalmist, while angels unceasingly glorify the holiness of the God of heaven. We must therefore seek with prayerfulness and earnest effort here true likeness to God, true holiness; and we must devote all our energies to preparing for that place into which nothing unclean can enter, that place so holy for evermore.

Then, again, we must, in seeking things above and setting our affections on them, seek to have heavenly love as our heart's guest. Love rules supreme in heaven, for God is love. In heaven hatred is unknown, in heaven there are no strifes. In heaven love abounds between God and Christ, between angel and saint, between the heavenly Father and all His children. Perfect, unchanging, unbroken, is the love of heaven. Earth is a hotbed of strife and envy and hatred. Bitter feelings in human hearts are ever breaking forth into domestic broils, and social quarrels, and destructive international and civil wars. But there are no bitter feelings engendering evil and unkind acts in heaven. Love is there, omnipotent and eternal. It therefore behoves them that are risen with Christ to pray and strive to live more and more in peace, goodwill and love.

II. But, my dear brethren, it is proper that we should now consider, in the second place, what are the grounds whereon St. Paul founds his exhortation to seek the things that are above.

They are these, (1) that believers are risen with

Christ, and (2) that Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.

Believers are risen with Christ. To their rising with Christ St. Paul alludes in verse twelve of the second chapter, where he says, “Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead,” and in verse twenty of the same chapter, where he further says, “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?” Believers, as I remarked at the beginning of this discourse, are closely, organically united with Christ. The doctrine of the union of Christ with believers is, I have already said, one of the most mysterious of all doctrines. For the union is not one of mere feeling and sympathy, but very much more. It is an organic union, a union of soul with soul, a union such as is that of the vine with its branches, a union such as is that of the body with its members, a union such as is that of the head with the body. Yet, mysterious as this union is, Scripture testifies alike to its reality and its blessed results. The uniform testimony of Scripture is that believers are so closely united to their Saviour as to share in His actions and in His glories.

Being united with Christ, believers participate in the death and in the resurrection of Christ. Christ died to sin and in Him believers die to sin. He died to sin. Sinless Himself, He yet bare the

sins of many. His death was a true atonement for sin. Dying, He bore the punishment of sin, although not of His own sin. But, having died once, the sins of men no longer lay on Him, He could not die again, they could not bring on Him again the accursed death of the cross. Now, in virtue of their union with Christ, believers died with Him, died to sin, ceased to be burdened with its guilt. But Christ rose again and in Him did believers rise. The moment a man believes, that moment does he become a partaker in Christ's resurrection. Now, the life to which Christ rose was a higher life. His life on earth was one of intense humiliation. From the manger wherein He was first laid, to the cross whereon He died to sin, He passed on with "His glory veiled." But from the day when He rose from the stranger's grave wherein He had been laid, He lived a life of exaltation. Stern Roman soldiers quaked at the sight of His resurrection glories, angels attended Him as He ascended in a bright cloud to heaven, angels worship Him as now He sits enthroned on high. And as Christ thus rose to a higher life, so with Him do believers rise to a higher life. They rise to a life worthier and nobler. Christ, perfect in purity, could not rise to a purer life, but believers do. They rise to be something that they were not before, they rise to be nearer the Father, they rise meet for eternal glory. United to Christ as they are, they are partakers of His glorious life, they are sharers in His exaltation, they live that spiritual

and immortal life which immeasurably excels the mere animal life of some, and the mere intellectual life of others. And as the life is higher, so are the objects to be pursued higher. Every life has its own proper objects. The mere animal life has for its objects things seen and temporal, things manifest to the senses, and these only. The intellectual life has for its objects higher things, things many of which make no appeal to the senses, and others of which, if appealing to them, appeal in a purer and loftier way than do those things that are the objects of the merely animal life.

Now, as every life has its own proper objects, there are objects proper to the new life which believers derive from Christ. That spiritual life must have spiritual objects. It cannot be satisfied with the things that please the senses, or with the things that satisfy the intellect. It must have spiritual objects of its own. It is easy therefore to see how much force there is in the words, "If ye then be risen (rose) with Christ, seek those things which are above." If men have faith and through faith are united with Christ, then are they sharers in Christ's life of exaltation, then are they living a new and nobler life. And, living that higher life, surely it is incumbent on them that they should seek loftier objects, that they should rise above things seen and temporal, that they should have a spiritual religion, that they should cast away all impure affections, that they should lay aside the bonds of worldli-

ness, and that they should imitate their Redeemer in all things.

But you will mark, my dear brethren, that St. Paul uses the words, "Where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." Now these words contain a further reason for setting our affections on things above. Christ's risen life, that life in which believers share, is not only glorious, but it is most glorious. "He sits at the right hand of God." It is not difficult to comprehend the meaning of these words. For to sit at one's right hand is to enjoy the highest honour one can offer, and to sit at God's right hand is therefore to be God's most honoured friend. Christ sits at God's right hand; how glorious His position therefore! how exalted His life! Angels have no glory like His, archangels share not in His honours. And mark you, dear brethren, that it is not of Christ's divinity, but of His humanity that our text is speaking. It is as the man Christ Jesus, the mediator between God and man, that Christ holds that exalted position whereof our text speaks.

Now believers share in the life of Him whose position is so glorious. How heavenly therefore should their lives be! If they are partakers of the life of Him whose place is by God's right hand, if they are sharers in the life of the exalted Being that in the highest heaven wears still a nature truly human, how unseemly is it that they should live for the earth, how unfitting that they should fix their affections on the things of time, how needful that they should set their affections on things above.

I would remark, before I close, that the words, "Where Christ sitteth at God's right hand," appear to be meant to comfort and cheer believers, by assuring them of the ready aid of that glorious and exalted Being whose resurrection life they share.

When mén are exhorted to seek those things that are above, to be unworldly, to be pure, there comes over them sometimes a sense of their weakness, a feeling that they are insufficient for these things. They feel that they have to contend against much natural weakness and grave temptations. But there is no occasion why any man, anxious to lead a heavenly life, should be afraid. He that has faith has on his side Christ the mighty, Christ whose place is on the right hand of the Almighty Father, Christ who can, from the position which He holds, give His people all the aid they need.

Let those, therefore, that desire to be holy cherish an abundant faith in Christ. He will give them the aid they need.

And now, my dear brethren, in closing this sermon let me exhort you to set your affections on things above.

Are you risen with Christ? Have you put faith in Christ? O! if you have, see how thoroughly you set your affections on things above. Little, as I said before, becometh it the eagle with its cloud-cleaving pinions and sun-enduring eye to tarry in deep valleys and in the lower regions of space. Its place is on the lofty mountain or in the sunlight air. And so, my brethren, if you are in Christ your

work is to be Christian; indeed, to strive ever to attain new heights of holiness. But have you not put faith in Christ? Have you not become believers? Then are you not risen to that high and blessed life to which believers rise. Dying now, you would not rise to glory, for as yet you share not in the life of Christ. O! I entreat you, believe in Christ. Be not of the earth when you might be of heaven. You were not made to live for earth alone, to care for earth alone, to have no share in the highest life, the life spiritual and eternal. Cling no longer therefore to earth with its things that are at best perishing and that often are sinful. But put your trust in Christ, for trusting in Him you will be united to Him and will share in His resurrection life. And, trusting in Him, remove your affections from the poor objects to which now they cling, and seek heavenly honours, and nearness to God, and perfect holiness and love. Setting your affections on these, you will receive them.

See, my beloved brethren, that you all put your trust in Christ and set your affections on things above. For with your affections set on things above you will be truly preparing for heaven, and heaven with all its glories will be yours hereafter.

XX.

“For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in Glory.”—Colossians iii., 3-4.

ST. PAUL opens the chapter of our text by speaking of the believer as being risen with Christ. The mention of the Christian’s rising with Christ naturally led the Apostle to think and speak of the death which preceded this rising again. Accordingly he speaks of this death in the text. Having spoken of it, however, he proceeds to speak again of the Christian’s new life, saying something both of its present and of its future.

It is no uncommon thing for St. Paul to contrast the two things which he contrasts in our text. We find him, for example, saying in one place, “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live;” in another, “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord;” and in another, “For I, through the law, am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.” His object in thus contrasting these things seems to be to bring out very fully the change that takes place on a man when he becomes one with Christ, to shew that when he does so he becomes wholly a new man.

He tells us therefore in our text that believers are dead, in order that he may all the more strikingly bring before us their new life. Now we propose to say something about both the death and the life here spoken of.

And, first, of the death. Speaking to Christ's sincere followers, the Apostle says, "Ye are dead," or "Ye died." The death of which he thus speaks is evidently death in Christ, something different from temporal or spiritual death. In the first verse of the chapter of our text we read of believers as being "risen with Christ," as, that is, sharing, through their union with Him, in the blessings of His resurrection; and so in our text, when we read of them as "being dead," or "having died," we are to understand that the allusion is to their sharing, through the same union with Him, in the death to sin which He died. A careful consideration of the passages to which I have already alluded, and others of like nature, will lead us to the conclusion that to be dead, in the sense in which our text speaks of "being dead," is to have Christ's death to sin regarded as ours. This is specially taught us in the words, "I am crucified with Christ," which can have but one meaning, namely, this, "I, because I am one with Christ through faith, must be held as having suffered with Him on the cross, as having endured in Him the punishment of sin and, in fact, as having died to all to which He died." Scripture everywhere tells us of a close union between Christ and true Christians—so close a union, indeed, that

His deeds and sufferings become, in a most true sense, theirs; and it was the remembrance of this union and its consequences that led St. Paul to say in one place, "I am crucified with Christ," and in another, "For ye are dead," or "For ye died." In one sense, indeed, we are all dead to the past, for the past cannot return. Yet the past so far lives in the present, as the artist's genius lives in his works. And we are strictly dead to that in the past with which we have broken. Thus the Christian is dead to his evil past. But he is dead through his union with Christ. And that union has brought more than a breaking with past sins. It has brought death to the guilt of the past. Christ, by His crucifixion, endured the punishment of sin, for when Scripture says that "He died unto sin once," whatever more it may mean, it means evidently that He once bore sin's punishment. Now, so complete for all purposes of salvation is the union between Christ and His people that, just because they are united to Him, they also may be said to have died to sin or suffered its punishment. His were the mockeries and the scourgings; the dire and crushing weight of the cross was laid on His shoulders, the crown of thorns pressed His brow, the cruel nails rent His hands and His feet, and the light of God's countenance was hid from Him for a time; in offering up atonement for sin, in paying the penalty due to sin, He stood alone. All the misery and pain and degradation, which any of us may suffer, cannot atone for sin; He and He alone

could and did atone for it. Yet although the divine wrath in all its intensity was borne by Christ alone, there is yet the utmost reason why believers should regard themselves as being in exactly the same position as if they had one and all drained the cup of God's wrath to its very dregs. We desire you to treasure up this in special remembrance, to bear constantly in mind that all true believers died in Christ, that they all are esteemed as having borne the full punishment of sin. The importance of the truth that Christ's death, as the punishment of sin, is imputed to His people will be very evident to us, when we remember that complete reconciliation between God and man is impossible, and hence that a new life of peace and safety is impossible, till justice's every claim should have been satisfied. But Christ's death met every such claim, and therefore if Christ's death for sin is counted as His people's death for sin, justice can threaten them no more. Now, what our text first teaches us is just this, that Christ's death is regarded by the Almighty as being the death of every believer, and therefore that believers are free from condemnation. How glorious a truth, therefore, is that taught us in the words, "For ye are dead." They tell us of stern and unrelenting justice crying for the sinner's life, and tell us that justice has had its every claim satisfied; they tell us of souls stained with guilt so foul that no floods of penitential tears could wash it away, and yet tell us that this guilt has been wholly removed; they tell us of a punishment so dread that

no mortal could bear it and live eternally, and yet they tell us that this punishment has been borne and that man may eternally live. "Ye are dead." If you are believers you are regarded as having borne sin's punishment to the full, and yet, O! wonder of wonders, you have never personally borne it at all! To some men it may seem an idle tale when we tell them of believers sharing in Christ's death, having His death on the cross counted as theirs; but however some may laugh at the idea of dying with Christ, however unintelligible to the carnal mind may be the statements of Scripture regarding that union between Christ and Christians, which made His death theirs, there is no truth more important for us than this, that when Christ died on the cross all His true followers died in Him, bore in Him the punishment of their sins, because they could not bear it in themselves and live.

Yet this is not all that our text teaches when it says, "Ye are dead." Surely it teaches also that believers by their union with Christ have died to sin's power. When Christ died He died to all connection with sin, and whenever men come into living union with Him they break with, die to their old life. They too, as members of His body, have passed out of the region where sin is mighty. Their Lord personally was sinless, they all have sinned: but, coming into fellowship with His sinlessness, they cease to be what they once were. They are new creatures; they must have died to their old life. They are not perfect, they are not incapable

of transgression, but they have truly broken with the life of sin.

II. Yet this death of the believer to sin, this sharing with Christ in His death, which means deliverance from the guilt and also from the power of sin, important as it is, is not the leading theme of our text. St. Paul speaks of believers' communion with Christ in His death, only that he may all the more strongly bring before them (believers) their communion with Him in His life and glory. He says, "Ye died," which means, "You, in virtue of your union with Christ, are in the same position as if you had suffered all that is due to sin, and have had sin's power broken in you," and then he says, "Your life is hid with Christ in God," which means, "When Christ rose from the dead you rose in and with Him, and as you shared His death so now do you share His life." Thus does our text make Christ everything to the Christian, thus does it shew that union with Christ is the sure source of every true blessing. Is death the wages of sin, and must these wages be paid? Our text tells us that Christ has paid these wages for His people. Is endless life in glory and purity the sole thing for which it is worth living? Then our text tells us that Christ has secured it for His own.

There are very glorious things said in our text regarding the life of which it tells us. "Your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." Here then do we learn that

Christians even now possess, in virtue of their union with Christ, a life which will never end. Of this life two things are said, first, that it is hid, and, second, that there will yet be a glorious manifestation of it.

(1) It is first said that the Christian has a life which is at present hid. "Your life is hid with Christ in God." These words answer a twofold purpose; they meet the cavils of those who sneer at Christ's death for believers, and speak as if that death were valueless; and they encourage Christians to hope, notwithstanding that they do not yet see clearly and fully the glorious results of Christ's death.

(a) Some, mocking, may say, "You speak of Christ dying, and rising to glory, and you say that believers died with Him and are risen with Him. If then they, like Him, have risen to glory, where is their glory? We see Christ's professed followers suffering common sorrows, tried with common trials, sinning sometimes common sins, and dying the common death. We see nothing of glory in them. Why then tell us that they are risen with Christ; that they are living a new and glorious life?" Our text answers such mockers by telling them that the life of believers is "hid with Christ in God." Believers have a life, a glorious and spiritual life, resulting from their union with Christ, but this life of theirs is not yet manifested in anything like full measure to themselves, is not yet much manifested to others. Christ, their life, is with God, is not yet

come a second time, has not appeared in glory before the assembled world, and until He does so their glorious life shall not be revealed in its fulness. Yet, although it is presently hid, it is none the less really existing. To some of those, however, who scoff at the idea of the believers partaking in the death and in the glorified life of Christ, it may seem mere trifling on our part, when we say, following the teaching of Scripture, that the new life is almost or altogether hidden. Yet this at least is certain, that the mere fact that the true life of the believer is hidden or unseen is no proof that it does not exist. He who says that the life spoken of in our text is no life, because as yet it has not been manifested, would have his parallel in the man who would deny that in the acorn there is the vital force needed to produce an oak, denying this because such force is unseen. You gaze on the acorn. It is a tiny thing with, so far as appears, no very high organization; and yet from that small acorn will spring a mighty tree, upon whose branches the sweet-voiced birds shall sing from generation to generation, among whose dense foliage the zephyrs of summer shall murmur for ages, amid whose falling leaves the winds of many autumns shall sigh, and against whose gnarled and knotted trunk the winter tempests of centuries shall spend their strength in vain. Now, just as there is in the acorn an unseen but mighty energy which will work on for centuries, so is there in the Christian, or rather, to speak more exactly in accordance with Scripture, in Christ for the

Christian, a hidden, yet most glorious and eternal life. Nor is it absolutely hidden even from the world. There are indications of its existence. When we see Christianity elevating and purifying a man, and genuine Christianity always does so, we have reason to believe strongly in the statements of Scripture concerning that hidden life which will yet be revealed in glory.

(b) We remarked, however, that the words, "Your life is hid with Christ in God," not only meet the sneers of those who are given to mocking at the new life, but also encourage genuine Christians to hope for a full manifestation of the glorious results of Christ's death for them. Even Christ's true followers sometimes, because they cannot see, fail to believe. Christ's word tells them of a blessed life following a mystical death, tells them that they, having died with and in Christ, are now risen with Him; but sometimes they feel themselves questioning in their own minds whether they be risen indeed. At seasons of great trial and suffering, at periods of bitter temptation, in hours of grief on account of recently committed sin, they are in danger of questioning whether indeed they are not under some delusion about the new life; whether they, were they indeed risen with Christ, would not have a lot free from suffering, temptation and sin. To them, perplexed and doubting, our text brings comfort, saying, "Your life is hid with Christ in God." As if it would say, "You are now indeed risen and living, but as yet your life is hardly at all manifested

even to yourselves. Be not then discouraged that as yet you have to sorrow often, that as yet you are not quite free from all danger of falling for a moment into sin. A life of perfect happiness and perfect purity is even now in Christ's keeping for you, but it is God's will that it be not revealed in its fulness to you for a time." Here, however, my dear brethren, let there be no misunderstanding. If a man finds himself a constant and most willing slave of sin, then he has no right to esteem himself to have a life hid with Christ in God. One should not fancy that simply because he is not perfect therefore he is no true Christian and no heir of heaven, seeing that no one is perfect on earth; but the fact that lack of perfection here does not necessarily prove that a man is not a Christian, should not embolden any to esteem themselves as Christians and heirs of the hidden life, while yet they wholly delight in sin. It is only when one is conscious that he is trusting his whole salvation to Christ, when he sees on a careful, honest and prayerful survey of his life that God has wrought a true change on him, has filled him with new affections, desires and aspirations, has made him poor in Spirit, a mourner for sin, and so truly meek as to be willing to give himself wholly to God's guidance and teaching, has led him to hunger and thirst after righteousness and has so far satisfied the desires which he has himself implanted; it is only when one is thus conscious that heaven has really become to him more than earth, that his heart is so much changed that he is really seeking

things above; it is only, we say, when this has taken place that he has good and right reason to esteem as addressed to himself the words, "Your life is hid with Christ in God." But when he is conscious of a thorough change in heart and life, of there being in his heart, once occupied by doubt, carelessness and impurity, trust, love, anxiety for a holy life and hatred of sin, and in his life, once worldly and impure, piety and purity, then may he most truly believe himself to be dead to sin's guilt, and to have, notwithstanding occasional appearances to the contrary, a life hid with Christ in God; then may he, seeing what God hath already wrought in him, say with no vain boast, "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me."

But we have not exhausted all the comforting teaching of our text about the Christian's life in Christ, when we have stated that our text gives a positive assurance that the Christian has such a life, although it is not yet fully revealed. When it is stated that our Lord's true followers have a life hid with Christ in God, it is taught us that this new life of theirs is very secure. There would be attempts, and doubtless successful attempts, on the part of the powers of darkness to rob Christians of their new life, were that life in their own guardianship. But it is not given to them to be the guardians of their own immortal interests. Their life, that true and glorious life of theirs, which has yet to be revealed in all its fulness, is carefully preserved and protected by Christ. When I speak

thus regarding the Christian's immortality I do not of course mean that he is to give himself no care, no concern, about the future. Quite the reverse. He should ever be most watchful, most prayerful, most careful, in his preparation for heaven; but he should not be filled with fears about the future. What could he have better suited to dispel his fears and fill his heart with hope than the assurance that his life is hid with Christ in God? Is it not most natural that, having this assurance, his language should be that of St. Paul to Timothy, "I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." Our text gives us a threefold assurance of the security of the new life. It tells us (1) that it is hidden. Now, if it is hidden, it is surely in less danger that if it were left exposed to countless foes. Then our text tells us (2) that it is hid with Christ, and, as if even this were not a full proof of its security, it tells us (3) that it is hid with Christ in God. I see not then, my friends, how harm can come to a life so guarded and shielded. Ancient fables tell us of a hero who had a body proof against wounds in every part save one. Being wounded in that part, however, he perished. But the Christian, in so far as regards this life, of which our text speaks, has no weak point. It is all strength, all security with him so far as it is concerned. What firmer ground, then, can hope stand on than on the blissful assurance thus presented by our text, "Your life is hid with Christ in

God." Need we wonder that with such an assurance St. Paul said, "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

(2) But our text tells us, not merely that we have even now a life hid with Christ in God, but also that there will yet be a glorious manifestation of this life. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." The union between Christ and Christians is thus, you see, a perfect and a lasting one. They are one with Him in His death, one with Him in His resurrection, one with Him in His glory. So thoroughly are they united to Him that in the end they must be where He is. Our text announces very strikingly the glorious final outcome of the union of Christ with His people. No sooner shall the trumpet have sounded and the dead arisen, no sooner shall Christ have come with the clouds, to be seen of every eye, than the hidden life of the Christian shall be revealed in all its glory. Christ is even now His people's life, they are drawing life from Him day by day, but never till the day of His second appearing shall it be known how much is meant by the words, "Christ, our life." Then, however, it shall be known. Here there is a distinction between Christ's true followers and others, yet is there sometimes a danger of judging

wrongly with regard to who are so and who are not; but hereafter there will be an entire separation between them. Here pain and sorrow and temporal death befall those who are Christ's as well as those who are not, here temptations assail the believing as well as the unbelieving, here the saved know not what it is to overcome all sin. But hereafter the saved shall live a glorious life, a life free from grief and care and sin, and not glorious alone from being free of what deprives this life of glory, but glorious because spent in so exalted a home and with so many glorious elements in itself. They shall appear with Christ in glory. Their bodies, once weak and mortal, shall rise in glory and power; their souls, once stained with sin and never on earth quite delivered from weakness, but at death made all glorious and pure, shall join these risen and glorious bodies; incorruptible crowns shall adorn their foreheads, which shall bear on them no trace of earth's sorrow and care; and robes, spotless as the snow and dazzling as the sun, shall clothe their bodies, which shall wear no mark of having been subjected to the powers of suffering, death, and the grave.

In vain, however, do we seek to give any adequate idea of the glory that awaits Christ's people. It is enough for us to know that unspeakable glory awaits them, to know that when Christ shall appear His people shall be like Him. Knowing this, let us continually and earnestly seek to be His friends, for if we are so we shall share His glory, and how great must that glory be!

My dear brethren, are the words of the text true of you? Have you, through faith in Christ, become one with Him, and thus died to sin, and have you now a life hid with Christ in God? Or instead of having died to sin are you still dead in sin, and therefore without hope and without God? If you are believing in Christ and thus freed from sin's punishment, see that with the utmost earnestness you seek freedom from its power, see that you set with all truth your affections on things above. But if you are void of faith and still dead in sins, turn now from sin to God. Why miss the wondrous glory which is put so completely within your reach, why perish when life is in your offer? Humble yourselves, dear brethren, and come to Christ; trust in Him and He will save you. He will deliver you from spiritual death, He will free you from every spiritual danger, He will shield your true life from every harm, He will confess you at the great judgment day, and He will take you to dwell for ever in glory in the blessed Kingdom of Light.

Dead to sin's guilt! How glorious it is to be that! How blessed it is to be free from all condemnation! And how powerful an influence in purifying and elevating life should there be in the thought that God's own love in Christ has taken away the barrier that stood in the way of blessedness.

Dead to sin's power! How blessed it is to have been thus truly emancipated from a baneful thraldom, and to have before one all possibilities of pure and Christlike living here and in eternity.

Having one's life hid with Christ in God! How truly glorious is that! To be linked in spirit with Jesus, to be even now, in a sense, with Him above, to know that His life is our life for ever, is not this blessedness? Well may we set our affections on things above, set them where He is who is our Saviour, our Pattern, our very Life.

XXI.

“ Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth ; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry : for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience : in the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now also ye put off all these : anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds ; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him.”—Colossians iii., 5-10.

IN order that the ground may bring forth abundantly the fruits which we desire, it must first be cleared of noxious weeds. The same field cannot produce at once a mass of weeds and an abundant harvest of precious grain. The weeds take away the nourishment which should go to the growing corn, and themselves choke and destroy it. Hence, if one would have his ground to yield a meet harvest, he must be careful to have the weeds destroyed. It is not enough simply to break them, or to cover them lightly with mould and expect them to die. What one has to do is to uproot and destroy them. And even as the weeds must be uprooted and destroyed in order that the fields may yield their produce, so the evil elements in our nature must be rooted out and destroyed in order that we may be fruitful in what is good. There are principles in our nature

that do not require to be destroyed. Everything that the earth brings forth spontaneously, as it were, and apart from any care of man, is not a noxious weed.

The earth brings forth freely the sweet grass which nourishes the cattle, the wild flowers whose beauty charms the eye and the fruits that please the taste. And human nature, imperfect as it is, has qualities that are commendable and worthy. How good, for example, is parental love, and such love is practically universal. How good too is the neighbourly spirit, and that spirit is also practically universal, else society could not exist. Yes, all men are imperfect, and all the qualities of man are affected by his imperfection, but still there is even in the natural man that which needs not to be destroyed, but to be strengthened and trained aright. But, while this is true, it is also true that there are elements in human nature which are only evil and ought simply to be eradicated. This is what St. Paul teaches when he says, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth." To mortify is simply to put to death, and the members which are on earth are simply those things in us which have, and can have, no affinity with the heavenly. The things in us therefore which are utterly unspiritual, the unholy desires, the evil passions, the coarse habits, so common among men in their natural state, are, the Apostle tells us, to be dealt with only in one way, the way of extermination. These things may have been to us as members of

our bodies, as very parts of ourselves, but they are not on that account to be spared. The weeds are, in a sense, the natural produce of our fields and gardens, and yet we strive to destroy them that something better may grow in their place. And evil desire and malice and covetousness and deceit may be natural enough to us, yet are they not to be allowed to live on in us. We are to destroy them that purity and truth and kindliness and contentment may flourish in our hearts and lives.

In our text St. Paul is appealing to us as Christians, and not merely as Christians by profession, but as Christians in very truth. He is speaking to us as those that are risen with Christ, as those that have a life hid with Christ in God. And it is just because of the relation in which we stand to Christ, and all which that relation involves, that he counsels us to mortify, to kill, our members which are on earth. He says, as it were, Ye claim to have died with Christ, and, if ye are Christians indeed, ye have died with Him. Shew the reality of your death with Him by giving over to death all that belongs to the old man, that so all the graces and beauties of the new life, the life in Christ, may have full field for their manifestation in you.

In our meditations on the text let us consider therefore the members which are to be mortified, and the reason why we are to mortify these members.

I. Let us consider, in the first place, the members which are to be mortified.

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.”

These members are practically the members of the old man, the old sinful self.

“I hold it truth with him who sings
To one clear harp in diverse tones
That men should rise on stepping stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.”

Of course, speaking in the most literal way, our members which are on the earth are simply the members of our bodies, but it is not these, except in a figurative way, that St. Paul would have us to mortify. No doubt our Lord himself said, “If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.” Yet, surely the plucking out of which our Lord thus spoke was not a literal but a figurative plucking out. And, even so, if we take our members which are on earth as literally the members of our bodies, the mortification of them of which St. Paul speaks is necessarily a figurative mortification. It is better, however, to regard our members which are on earth, as St. Paul speaks of them, as first the passions and habits of the old natural man, the old self that was enmity against God. These members we have to mortify, to put literally to death. The body of sin has to be destroyed. There can be no compromise in this matter. We are not to spare the sinful self in any way. Its non-destruction means our destruction.

Now, to guard us against all possibility of mistake as to what are the members that have to be mortified, St. Paul expressly mentions some of them and virtually indicates them all. We may take his words as teaching us that we have to mortify, to give over to death, fleshly cravings, covetousness, malice and everything that savours of falsehood. The list is not absolutely exhaustive. There are other evils of which we have to get rid. But the other evils are akin to these, and the command to mortify these is surely, to all intents and purposes, a command to mortify whatever is akin to them. Meantime let us turn our attention to those members on earth which in our text we are specially called to mortify.

(1) The first of these is impurity, unholy desire, unholy speech, unholy behaviour. My brethren, there is no more imperative call on us as Christian people than the call to put away from us everything that savours of impurity. If we harbour impure thoughts in our hearts, these thoughts will simply make pure and good thoughts impossible. You can have no growing corn where you have thorns and briars, and you can have no devout thoughts and no pure, heavenward aspirations where you allow impure thoughts to lodge. Impure thoughts too often lead to impure words and deeds, but even where something, such as worldly prudence, may keep them from doing so, they still utterly mar the soul. And if impure thoughts mar the soul, assuredly impure words and actions mar the outer life. Nothing is

more unbecoming, more revolting than foul conversation, and nothing so utterly degrades one as coarse and impure behaviour. Impurity in any form is utterly destructive of good. The river may come down from the mountain fastnesses pure and sparkling, the fish darting nimbly from stone to stone in its bed, but when in its course the sewage of towns and other pollutions are poured into it, its once pure waters become foul and unsightly, nay, poisonous and destructive. No one would dare to drink of them, and the fish that chance to enter them die. And impurity of thought or speech or action is just to life what the inflowing pollution is to the once pure, sweet stream. It defiles and poisons life. And just because all that is sweet and fair and attractive in life is destroyed by impurity, it behoves all of us to be careful beyond measure that heart and life be pure.

(2) Another of the members on earth which in our text we are called to mortify is covetousness. Now, it may appear to some as being rather strange that covetousness should be linked with impurity. Covetousness, such will say, is unquestionably a very despicable thing, a thing that indicates very distinct littleness of mind, but it is not coarse and gross as impurity is. Now this is, no doubt, to a large extent true. Covetousness is not a gross thing like impurity. Still covetousness, using the word in its strict sense, is a very debased and debasing habit of soul. It is quite true that there are many not wholly unworthy people who are somewhat hard.

There is perhaps from the human point of view a certain excuse for some of them. They have at some time or other had a painful struggle with poverty, they have had anything but a luxurious upbringing, they find it difficult at the best to get ends to meet, and while one regrets their narrowness, one can hardly wonder that under the circumstances they attach a somewhat exaggerated value to money. There are others, however, who are somewhat grasping, and for whom no kind of excuse can be made, and whose narrowness is a sad blot on otherwise blameless lives. But while all narrowness is unseemly, covetousness is more than unseemly. The Apostle characterizes it by a very severe term ; he calls it idolatry, and unites it with impurity as a thing for whose sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience. The covetousness of which he thus speaks so severely is that "unhallowed desire of having" of which an ancient Latin poet, Virgil, speaks, that absorbing and insatiable eagerness for the world which simply destroys all spiritual aspiration in man. It is little wonder, it seems to me, that the Apostle speaks of impurity and covetousness as drawing on the people who are guilty of them the wrath of God. For though they are unlike sins, they are alike in their destructive effects on the spiritual nature of man. They both render impossible any lifting of the soul to God : they both bind men in bonds of earth. The covetous man may not be the coarse, gross creature that the impure man is, but he is a mere

idolator who has put the world in the place which God should fill. In living out the true Christian life, we must therefore mortify covetousness.

(3) Another of the members on earth which we are called to mortify is malice.

“But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.” Blasphemy here means, in all probability, slander and filthy communication, insulting and abusive speech. The whole verse may be taken as teaching us that the Christian man must be without malice in thought, speech or action. Now, I fear much, my dear brethren, that we are apt to come very far short of obedience to this apostolic counsel, nay, that we hardly apprehend how far reaching a counsel it is. Perhaps there is no one of us that does not recognise that no one should be cruel, or bitterly unforgiving, or constantly harsh in speech. But how many of us, alas! if not actually cruel in our deeds, are apt to cherish bitter feelings in our hearts, and to give expression to cruel and cutting words? Let us learn that for the Christian everything that even savours of bitterness is to be abjured, that the Christ-spirit cannot subsist side by side with the spirit of malice and uncharitableness. Let but even a little bitterness be allowed to lodge in the heart and it will end by destroying all better and worthier feelings.

“It is the little rift within the lute,
That by and by will make the music mute,
And, ever widening, slowly silence all.”

If there is one evil weed that is to be uprooted from the heart it is the harsh and malicious thought that is but too likely to bear the noxious fruit of bitter words and unkind deeds.

(4) Yet another of the members on earth which we are called to mortify is falsehood.

“Lie not one to another.”

There are men, who can hardly be called religious men, that yet despise and abjure all that is untruthful, and, sad to say, on the other hand, men who profess to be religious and who yet do not show a strict regard to truth. Yet, my friends, nothing should be more hateful to us than anything that savours of the false. Is not our Master “the truth”? Is not God the God of truth? If falsehood is a member of the natural man, it is a member which we cannot be too eager to mortify. Not only must we not lie to one another in the sense of saying that which we know to be false; but we must avoid everything that savours of insincerity. Boastfulness, exaggeration, claims to a spiritual experience which is not strictly ours, all these we must avoid. Better the fragment of quartz, which plainly is but a piece of stone and nothing more, than the piece of coloured and polished glass which is paraded as a gem. And better for us all to be our simple honest selves than to try to appear to be what we are not. Let us indeed be the best we can be, but let us never claim to be more and better than we are.

Impurity, covetousness, malice, falsehood, these,

and with them such things as pride, and self-conceit, and vain display and intemperance, must all go out of our lives. We may once have walked in them, but we must walk in them no more. They are base things and unworthy, the things which characterise the children of disobedience, the things which draw down the wrath of God. There is something better for us than these, the purity which is angelic, the soul's delight in God himself, the gentleness which is Christ-like, the truth which is divine. And that we may walk in these better things, let us abjure the worse: let us "mortify our members which are upon the earth."

II. Let us now consider, in the second place, the reason why we are to mortify our members which are upon the earth.

The reason is that as Christians we have passed out of the life of the flesh into that of the Spirit. "Seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created Him."

My friends, if we are yet unchanged in heart and strangers to the Christian life, the reason which St. Paul urges will have little weight with us. We are more likely to be influenced by the fear of that wrath of God which cometh upon the children of disobedience. But St. Paul's appeal is an appeal to us as Christians, and we must let the Apostle reason with us in his own way.

We must not forget that our text was addressed

in the first instance to people, most of whom had been brought up in heathenism, and who had made a public profession of their faith on being baptised. These people had openly claimed to have put away their old, corrupt, heathen life, and to have entered on life in Christ. In most cases, we may well believe, the profession was genuine, and St. Paul took it as such. Naturally then he said to them as converts from an evil, heathen life, "Ye have put off the old man." Formally they had assuredly done so, and he addressed them as having done so really, and bade them give proof that they had done so. Now, there has been nothing in our lives exactly answering to the coming forth of these Colossians from amid the heathen to proclaim their allegiance to Christ. Yet we have all made, in some form or other, a profession of Christianity, and in so far as that profession is genuine we may be addressed as these Colossian Christians were addressed by St. Paul. Our profession of Christianity is a claim to belong to Christ, and if that claim is true we too have passed through a great spiritual change. The natural man everywhere, whether in Christendom or heathendom, may or may not be grossly immoral, but he is of the earth and indifferent to the things of God. The man who has come into true union with Christ has died to the old earthly life and entered on a new and heavenly one. He is a new creature. He is renewed, made new, in knowledge, in knowledge of the new and better way, in knowledge that is not theoretical only, but deeply

practical. He is made new, made afresh, recreated in the image of God. His aims, aspirations, hopes, joys, are all new and heavenly. Now, if to be, what we all profess to be, friends and, indeed, members of Christ, is to have passed through what is no other than a new creation, with what force should the Apostle's counsel, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth," come home to us! We may, indeed, fail to feel the force of his appeal to us, because our profession of Christianity is only a formal thing, and we have not passed through any great spiritual change. But, if we are such as we claim to be, if we have indeed come to Christ, and in the very coming to Him have put off the old man with his deeds and put on the new man, then what should weigh with us more than the counsel to mortify our members which are upon the earth? These members are the very members of the natural man, that old man whom in Christ we have put off. But where has been our putting off of the old man if we are guilty of impurity, or covetousness, or malice, or untruthfulness in any form? Death in Christ to sin, followed by rising with Him to holiness, is not something mystical merely, something that belongs to a region of beautiful visions, something that has little to do with actual every day experience. It is a thing real, practical, experimental. And we make it manifest as a reality by casting out malice, greed, untruthfulness and all uncleanness from our lives. The great result of union with Christ, and the great

proof of that union, are our deliverance from sinful desires and sinful habits. Why should I mortify my members that are on the earth, one may ask, and to him St. Paul replies, “ Because, if you are Christ’s, they are already condemned to death and ought at once to die.”

Christian brethren, all sinful living is a rebellious thing, and means for them that are guilty of it subjection to the wrath of God. But the wrong-doing of the man who calls Christ Master, what is that but utter unfaithfulness in his allegiance, and utter forgetfulness of Whose image he should wear. O ! as ye call Christ Lord, be heedful that ye do His will, be heedful that ye cast the evil things out of your lives. “ Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.”

XXII.

“Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all and in all.”—Colossians iii., 11.

ON a former occasion I dwelt upon the natural unity of mankind, that unity which results from the whole race having sprung from common ancestors. I desire now to speak to you of the unity of men in Christ, that unity which arises from the indwelling of Christ in all who believe.

The Apostle Paul, a thorough patriot in the best sense, was also in the best sense a thorough cosmopolitan. He was a man whose feelings were stirred and whose life was powerfully influenced by great ideas. There are men that are capable of thinking great thoughts, but who yet think these thoughts as in a dream. Their great thoughts do not master them, do not mould their lives. But St. Paul was no dreamer; he was a great practical thinker. His lofty conceptions mastered him, influenced his life in the most decided way. The thought of humanity as one great brotherhood is a magnificent thought and should be a powerful thought in its practical influence. Yet in the ancient world it was by no means a common

thought, and it certainly cannot be said to have been a fruitful thought. The Jew, in a way, knew that all men were brethren, but he was little impressed by the thought that they were so. The Gentile could not be impressed by the thought of the unity of mankind, for he was ignorant of that unity. But St. Paul knew well that all men were brethren, and his knowledge that they were so inspired him with the grandest Christian philanthropy. He could not but be cosmopolitan in his sympathies, he could not but be eager for the highest good of all, Jew and Gentile alike, for he saw in every man whom he met in his wanderings a brother in the flesh who might also become a brother in the spirit, and he felt that even those whom he had not seen were already his true brethren in Adam and might become his true brethren in Christ. The grand idea of the unity of mankind literally haunted him, filled his soul, inspired his affections, kindled his ardour, made him feel himself a debtor to the Jew and also to the Greek, sent him forth as the grandest, most self-forgetting missionary the ages have ever seen. How can I but love all men? how can I but labour for all? was his constant thought. Are we not all one? Does not the same blood run in the veins of us all? Have we not all one Father, even Adam? Nay, are we not all the brethren of Christ, who has taken our nature, and, as all His brethren, so all each others' brethren? And may not Christ, already the partaker of our flesh and blood, so come to the

hearts of us all as to make us brethren, not in the flesh only, but in the spirit ?

Thus the Apostle thought of the great natural unity of men in Adam, and of their great spiritual unity in Christ, of the unity actually existing, and the unity ideally existing, but waiting to be realised, and as he thought of these he laboured that the ideal might become the real, and that all men, brothers already in Adam, might be true brothers in the second Adam, the Lord from heaven.

Let us meditate for a little at this time on the theme which so warmed the heart of St. Paul and so aroused his missionary zeal, the unity of men in Christ.

I. Let us consider, in the first place, Christian unity in its manifestation.

“ Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free,” where, that is, all old race, class and religious distinctions are lost in a new manhood, and where all act towards each other as brethren, where, in other words, all are of the same lofty spiritual type and all are animated by love.

Such is the Apostle’s ideal of the aspect which society should wear, the ideal for whose realization he laboured and prayed, the ideal that he surely hoped would one day be realized. It is beyond all question a glorious one, and strong and heart-stirring are the words in which the Apostle tells us of it. Not a few hearts have kindled at the thought of world-wide brotherhood, not a few eloquent tongues

have discoursed in stirring words on the inspiring theme, not a few poetic pens have traced in happy numbers the sweetness of that time when

“ Man to man the world o'er
Shall brothers be ” . . .

—But never did heart kindle more at the inspiring thought, and never did pen write more sublimely as the thought made the heart burn, than kindled the heart or than wrote the pen of that grey missionary who had once been a persecutor. Never did so few words express so well a thought so noble. A single diamond is worth as much as many gems that yet are not without value. And amid all the really noble utterances that have been made on the theme of universal brotherhood, this utterance of the Apostle of the Gentiles is as a jewel that shines forth with all the pure glow and lustre of the diamond. In St. Paul's words we have the great expression of a great thought, the noble telling of a noble vision. St. Paul sees humanity no longer as a chaotic mass, all portions of it mutually repellent; sees it no longer torn by wars and class hatreds and sectarian animosities; sees it no longer as an aggregate of beings morally unlike, yet all morally defective; sees it rather as a beautiful and harmonious whole, a noble and indeed glorious unity; sees it as wearing everywhere the same fair spiritual aspect, and tells us of it in words that make our own hearts burn as they call up the same fair vision before our own eyes.

“ Neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor

uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free." These words speak of a glorious unity whose manifestations are likeness of spiritual characteristics, kindness and love between men of different races, freedom from the spirit of sect, and absence of all class bitterness. St. Paul did not indeed contemplate the decay of true patriotism, the absolute stereotyping of all religious opinions, the vanishing of all social distinctions, and the loss of all individuality. He would have men love their country, cherish their own religious convictions, accept their lot in life, whether high or low, and think and act for themselves. Yet he would have the love of country to be subordinated to the love of man, the social distinction to be forgotten in the largeness of Christian brotherhood, the religious conviction to be held without bitterness, the individual to fit well into his place in the community, and all to manifest in its main features the same high spiritual life. He saw little manifestation of unity in the world about him. He beheld everywhere the want of a true unifying spiritual life, and the presence of much division. He saw Jew standing aloof from Greek, and Greek contemning Jew, circumcision looking with a disdainful pity on uncircumcision, the Barbarian harassed by cruel wars, the Scythian in his savage rudeness scarcely reckoned as belonging to humanity, the wealthy noble living in idle and dissolute luxury, as if the earth were made for him alone, and the miserable bondsman dragging out a sad existence without

sympathy, without anything to mitigate his wretchedness. And he wished, as a humane man could not but wish, to see all this changed. But he did more than wish, he hoped. He saw in Christianity a regenerative force that was to make a new humanity, that was to fuse Jew and Greek, and even Barbarian and Scythian, in a blessed unity, that was to cast out the spirit of strife and abolish the hatred of class, that was to heal all religious division, that was to fashion all men after one noble spiritual type and end the long and weary reign of moral chaos and night. Individuality might remain, must remain ; but as many notes of music, each with its own characteristic sound, may yet be united to form one exquisite melody, so the many, with all their distinctive characteristics, might and would unite to form one true and glorious Christian brotherhood.

A glorious ideal! some one may say, yet an ideal and nothing more, an ideal that has never yet been realized, an ideal of whose realization there is surely but little promise. Have not nearly nineteen Christian centuries rolled away and still left in the world Jew and Greek, circumcision and uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond and free? Have men become alike in lofty spiritual characteristics and one in heart? Have the battle thunders rolled away ; have the Christmas bells rung out the feud of rich and poor, the civic slander and the spite ; have they rung in the larger heart, the kindlier hand? Has the Church itself even shown to the world the example of perfect spiritual purity and

the fair and attractive sight of brethren dwelling together in unity?

“Neither Jew nor Greek, neither Barbarian nor Scythian, but Christ all and in all,” and meanwhile mighty nations enlarge their armies and forge new weapons of destruction, and wait with ill-concealed impatience for the fitting moment to rush into mortal encounter. “Christ all and in all,” and “neither bond nor free,” and meanwhile party contends with party, and class clamours against class, and the foremost nations of the earth seem tottering on the brink of a dreadful pit of anarchy and revolution. “Christ all and in all,” and “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision,” and meanwhile the very Church itself is rent into countless sects, that seem to have forgotten that the Master gave men the new commandment that they should love one another as He has loved them, and deep heathen darkness yet reigns over the greater part of the world.

Well, we must grant that the Apostle’s ideal of humanity knit in the closest bonds of brotherhood, forgetting all the old distinctions that separated man from man, class from class, and race from race, and one in its high and pure spiritual life, has not yet been perfectly realized. Still, it has been realized in part, it is being realized more and more with the progress of the ages, it will one day be realized in all its fulness. Had there been less accomplished by Christianity in the past we might have despaired for the future, but after what it

has done in the face of the most tremendous difficulties we can have the largest hope as to what it yet will do. The swelling of the buds in early spring conveys to us but a scanty impression of what the summer foliage of the woods will be, yet even that swelling gives indication of the life that is in the trees and promise of all the forest glory that is to be. Be it, then, that Christianity has not yet accomplished everything, be it that the grand Pauline ideal of a perfect Christian brotherhood has yet been realized but in part, yet, if something has been accomplished, if the ideal has in part been realized, we can look forward in hope to the future. And indeed much has been realized. The truth that men are brethren, once unfamiliar enough in the world, has been made familiar, and that itself is much. For thought does move the world, however slowly, and if men have been taught to regard each other as brethren, then, although they may be slow to act as such, the thought of their brotherhood must more or less influence their feelings and actions. But this is by no means all. Jew and Greek have been brought together in the Christian Church, the Barbarian has become the Christian brother, the bondsman has found first consideration and then freedom under the influence of Christian teaching, and woman, long treated as little better than a slave, has been raised to her true position as man's helpmeet and equal. In the house of prayer, at least, the rich and the poor meet together as brethren in the Lord, nor is sympathy withheld

from the distressed, nor poverty held to be any drawback to the man of true spiritual nobility. The peace-loving spirit too grows apace in Christian communities, and voices eagerly pleading against international strife are heard on every hand. And although, alas! the Christian denominations love not each other as they ought, and although foolish party leaders utter wildly enough their dreary shibboleths, yet the spirit of charity prevails more widely than we sometimes are ready to believe, and the saintliest in all communions feel that denomination is little at the best and should never fetter Christian love. Moreover, wherever the Gospel has come it has renewed humanity, it has led men to live new lives. Christianity has therefore accomplished much in the way of promoting unity of Christian life and true brotherly unity among men, and has done so in spite of gravest obstacles. There are so many things that tend to keep men apart in spirit—national antipathies, class jealousies, sectarian prejudices, ignorance, selfishness, like cold and stormy waters that sever land from land, that to foster brotherhood is a task of unspeakable difficulty. Yet the Gospel has brought men together, has made them feel and act towards each other as brethren. Nor is it less difficult to bring men to unity of spiritual life, to one high spiritual type. Yet this too the Gospel has done. And, because of what it has accomplished, we thank God and take courage. The union of men in one glorious spiritual brotherhood, a brotherhood of holiness and a brotherhood

of love, is no enthusiast's dream. The time will come when war will cease, when high and low will live in brotherly concord, when the Church, world-wide in extent, will be one in feeling, if not one in form, and when, amid universal peace, all Christian graces will flourish into perfect beauty. Meantime it is for us to work for this blessed consummation, to walk in love one toward another, to recognise the Christian labours of others, and to do all we can to spread the blessed Gospel which is so well fitted to heal the sad disorders under which humanity has groaned so long.

II. Let us now consider, in the second place, Christian unity in its source.

The unity of Christians, manifested by peace and good-will, by the forgetting of race and class distinctions, by freedom from the sectarian spirit, and by lofty spiritual characteristics common to all, springs out of the union of all Christians with the Saviour. "But Christ is all, and in all." It is the hidden union with Christ, that putting on of the new man which is spoken of in the verse preceding our text, that gives unity of character to all true Christians, and it is the sense of union to Him that draws them together in a common brotherhood.

"Christ is all." These are most significant words, teaching not simply that Christ is everything to the Christian, which indeed is true, but also that Christ is the very centre of the Church's life, that all Christians are one with Christ, that He and His people together form but one mystical being, of

which they are the members and He is the head. We never exhaust the meaning of such expressions as, "Christ is all," when we say that they mean that His people's whole dependence for salvation is on Him, that they look to Him for justification, for guidance, for sympathy, for strength. They certainly mean all this. Christ's people trust not, as the Jew of old so often did, to privilege as insuring acceptance with God; boast not either, as the Greek of old was wont to do, of high natural endowments lifting them above other men. They glory only in Christ and His cross, they rest their hope of acceptance with God on Him only, they seek to be conformed to His image, they depend on the aids of His Spirit. Yet, while it is true that Christ is all to His people, and while that He is so is implied in the expression of our text, "Christ is all," if we want to get the full meaning of that expression we must read it in the light of such words as, "I am the vine, ye are the branches," or "Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." There is a real, although a mystical, union between Christ and His people, a union not of sympathy merely, but of life. There is indeed a union between Christ and all mankind, for by taking human nature He has linked Himself with all the race. Yet closer still is His union with believers, for they are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. And because Christians are united with Christ, and indeed members of Christ, there-

fore in very truth Christ is all. That such is the meaning of the expression, "Christ is all," is confirmed by the words which follow, the words, "And in all." Christ cannot be in all unless there is a vital union between Him and His people, unless they and He share a corporate life, unless they are as the branches abiding in the tree. But Christ is in all, so truly in all that there is no believer but may say, "Christ liveth in me," and Christ is in all believers because they all abide in Christ.

We can well understand now, therefore, why St. Paul says, "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free." The reason is that Christ's indwelling in them gives them unity.

(a) Christ's character is in all believers, inasmuch as they are in Christ and He in them. They have ceased to be men of different mould, men standing apart in moral characteristics, because they are all sharers in one exalted life. They may, as I have said, nay, they do, preserve their individuality, and yet their differences are not so striking as is their resemblance. We see in them all, in all true Christians, manifest unity of type, we discern in them all the same spiritual lineaments, and the reason why we do so is that they all are Christ's and have Christ in them. Indeed, it is not so much the Christian we see as his indwelling Lord, all and in all Christ. We have outer unity, the same pure life in all, the same holy conversation in all, the same tenderness in all, the same patience in all,

because we are seeing in all Christ manifested in His members. The river may in its course be parted into many streams, yet will each stream partake of the character of the fountain from which all flowed. The tree may have many branches, yet will each branch resemble the parent stem. Christ has many members, yet must all Christ's members be like himself. There must be brotherhood in holiness where there is everywhere one divine life.

(b) But Christian unity is not simply unity of spiritual characteristics, it is also unity of heart. And this unity of heart springs also from Christ being all and in all. For where Christ is there love must be. We cannot have Christ in us and have cold unfeeling hearts, we cannot have Him in us and be at enmity one with another: More than this. Not only does Christ in us quicken love in us as He quickens all other graces, but the sense that He is in us and in our brethren draws us in love toward them. How can we but love those in whom we see the Saviour, that Saviour to whom we ourselves are united? To love them is but another form of loving Him. Where Christ is then brotherhood will be. That brotherhood for which the best of our kind have longed and prayed will come when over all the earth Christ is all and in all.

XXIII.

"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."—Colossians iii., 12-14.

THE obligation to live righteously is universal. It is not the professedly Christian man alone on whom it is incumbent to do justly and to love mercy: it is incumbent on all men to do so. And, as a matter of fact, men in general own that there is a standard of right to which they should conform. Many of them may fix the standard low enough, and too few even endeavour to live up to such standard as they may fix, but few are prepared to hold that man is free to do just as he pleases. Men know that they have obligations, whether they fulfil them or not. But if it is obligatory on all men to live righteously, as indeed most people allow it is, it is in a special sense obligatory on Christians to do so. To face danger in the defence of his native land is the natural duty of every citizen capable of bearing arms, but it is in a very special way the duty of the man who has chosen to be a soldier. And thus, while it belongs to every man to live a pure and honest life, to do so in a very marked and pointed way belongs to him who calls Christ Master. If one claims to be a Christian he claims to be, not only a forgiven man, but also a renewed man, claims indeed to be risen with Christ and to be a partaker in the grace of the Saviour, and making such a

claim he is bound to live a gracious and godly life. It is on the ground of their union with Christ that St. Paul appeals to Christians to live devoted and earnest lives. He might have appealed to them in some measure by natural obligations, but he has not done so. He reminds them that they are united with Christ, that Christ is in them, and bids them put on the Christ-like character. If then, my brethren, you are what you profess to be, if you are Christians in more than name, if you are united to Christ by a living faith, you are in a very pointed and special way called to holy and loving lives. It is on certain aspects of the life which, as Christians, you are called to live that I desire to speak to you now. But that I may bring more fully home to you the urgent call which is addressed to you to live in a Christ-like way, let me speak to you first of that high position which, if you are Christ's, you even now hold.

I. Let us consider, in the first place, the high standing of all true Christians.

All true Christians are the elect of God, His holy and beloved ones. It is no matter of great moment from a spiritual point of view what worldly position a man occupies. Let a man but act righteously in the place which he fills and he may be indifferently high or low, rich or poor. In the kingdom of God there is no question of a man's worldly standing. "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all." The position of the bondsman is surely

humble in the extreme, yet even the very slave may be the Lord's freedman. But while the Christian's worldly position may be a very lowly one, how high is his spiritual standing? Christians are "God's elect." He has chosen them as citizens of His kingdom, nay, as members of His family, chosen them to be His heirs and joint heirs with Christ. "The elect of God." I have no wish, my brethren, to enter on the vexed question of predestination and free will. No amount of discussion will bring one to a solution free from difficulties. I am bound to believe in my personal freedom, or to doubt wholly the testimony of my consciousness, and at the same time I am bound to believe in the sovereignty of God in His own universe. But if you ask me to explain how I can reconcile my belief in personal freedom with my belief in the divine sovereignty, I can only answer that I am content to believe without trying to explain. But while I take absolutely no interest in the discussion of the question about predestination, at least as a mere matter of argument, I am very sure in my own mind that salvation, whether of the Church as a whole or of individual Christians, is wholly of God. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ." It was not man that sought God, but God that sought man, and it is not the individual that first draws near to God, but God that first draws near to him. The world had shown no interest in its own salvation when God sent His Son to seek and save that which was lost, and no

individual man thinks about his soul's peace and well-being till God moves him by the Spirit, acting through conscience and providential experiences and the Bible and the preaching of the Word. God brought salvation near to the whole Church, and He brings it near the individual. Every Christian is chosen. "Ye have not chosen me," said our Lord to His disciples, "But I have chosen you." Thus in very truth is it with all believers in regard to their relation to God. They have not chosen Him, but He has chosen them. And this choice, we may reverently believe, was a choice made from eternity, a choice not made arbitrarily, but in full accord with the divine wisdom and goodness. But if any hesitate about accepting, as it is ordinarily stated, the doctrine of predestination, I still emphasise what seems to me at least a plain fact of experience, the fact that, if we belong to Christ, we do so because God drew us to Him. Of course we came to Christ not against our will but with our will; but we did not think of coming to Him till God awoke the desire in our hearts. The fact remains then, whatever view men may take about predestination and the eternal decrees of God, that God has drawn believers to Himself through the Saviour in time, in other words, has chosen them. God provided a full salvation for men, and He brings individuals to accept that salvation. Hence all believers may be regarded as God's elect, those whom He has chosen. They may indeed be called God's elect from their union with Christ, who is

God's "elect in Whom His soul delighteth," but they are also fitly called God's elect because He has chosen and called them individually and personally. To what then has God elected, or chosen and called believers? He has called them to privilege, it is certain, called them to sonship, called them to be His "beloved," as St. Paul says, called them to pardon and peace and joy here, called them to His kingdom and glory. But He has not called them to privilege only, He has called them to service also. He has called them to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, called them to holiness and brotherly kindness and bearing of each others' burdens, called them to be helpful to their fellows, called them to work for the advancement of the kingdom. God's chosen ones, God's elect, are His witnesses in the world. We sometimes speak of the "elect" of society, meaning thereby, according to our way of looking at things, either its wealthiest and most fashionable members, or its cleverest and most brilliant ones. God's elect are the holiest and gentlest and meekest members of society. The chosen generation has been chosen to show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvellous light. O! my friends, we too often link in thought the election of God with justification only. It is much, who shall say how much, to be freed from condemnation, but it is not everything. It is a great thing surely to be lifted out of the old life of sin, and God has chosen His people to lift them out of that life. The elect of God are elected to holiness.

And this indeed the Apostle himself makes plain to us, for he speaks of Christians not only as elect, but also as "holy." "The elect of God, holy and beloved." In its strict, original sense, the word "holy" means "set apart for God." Christians are God's own people, His peculiar possession. But the very setting apart for God plainly implies elevation of character, purity. We cannot dissociate the ideas of consecration to God and righteousness of life. In any attempt to dissociate these ideas we only show ignorance of God's whole purpose in calling and choosing men, show ignorance indeed of the very character of God. God is Himself holy and He calls and chooses men to be like Himself. It has indeed, I grant, been too often fancied that God simply calls men to privilege. The Jews, for example, were very largely characterized by a tendency to think of themselves as the special favourites of heaven and to forget that God required them to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with Himself. And only too many have fallen into a kindred error. But while God assuredly calls men to privilege, calls them to His kingdom and glory, He very specially calls them to spiritual purity. The elect of God are holy, "consecrated to God in thought and life."

Yet, my dear brethren, while I am eager to impress upon you that the election of God is an election to holiness of thought and life, I would by no means have you to forget that it is also an election to sweet relationship to Himself. The

elect of God are not only holy, they are also beloved. They are called and chosen to a rich participation in the love of the heavenly Father. There is a very true sense in which God loves all men, and there is no man whom He is unwilling to bless. Yet His "beloved" are those that are united by faith to Christ, are those to whom Christ is all. God has no favourites, but He has those who live in the very sunshine of His love, those who are accepted in the beloved and are themselves the beloved of God. True, there is not in any man, as he is in himself, that which could commend him to God, but God sees His elect, not as they are in themselves, but as they are in Christ, their representative, and loves them for His sake. We never see the force of St. Paul's reasoning in this Epistle unless we keep clearly before us his teaching about the union of Christians with their Lord. Everything depends on that union. Christ is God's beloved Son in Whom He is well pleased, and we are only the truly beloved of God if we are in Christ. But if we are in Him then are we in very truth the chosen and beloved of God.

You see then, my brethren, the high standing of those that are in Christ. They are the very elect of God. How worthily should they live, to whom God has given so high a calling.

II. Let us now consider, in the second place, what should be the outcome in our lives of our relationship to God in Christ.

The elect of God, those whom He has chosen

as His own, those who are His beloved in Christ Jesus, should be marked by a special nobility and grace of character. They should wear in all things a close likeness to Christ. The heirs of God should be meetly adorned, should wear each of them a garment worthy of their standing. The priest ministering in the temple had his white robes betokening his office, the monarch has his crown, the great servants of the State have to wear on occasions at least a dress betokening their office, the soldier wears the uniform that suits his calling. "You," says St. Paul to Christians, "are the elect of God. Put on those spiritual garments that befit His elect." Of course the Apostle is not speaking of something merely put on outwardly, of an external show of sanctity. The garments of a man cling to him and fit him and take, as we may say, their form from him. And it is of something clinging closely to him and fitting him truly that St. Paul is thinking when he calls us, as the elect of God, to put on certain things. He asks for no mere outward show of piety, but for the very essence of it. It is of the very clothing of the soul that he is speaking. We have to put on, not a new appearance, but the new man, the man that is after Christ. St. Paul calls us, as the elect of God, to wear continually a garment of gentleness and patience and humility and love and peace and thankfulness. To put on this garment is to put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him.

Now, this putting on of the new man, means plainly, from the Apostle's words, the putting on of a new spirit both towards our brethren and towards God. At this time we shall confine our attention to what he says about the putting on of a new spirit towards our brethren. "Put on . . . a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering: forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye: and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness." We are, as the beloved of God, to bear ourselves towards our brethren in a spirit of perfect love.

It is plain that the Apostle has framed his counsel to us in view of the special circumstances in which we are placed in this world. We have to show our love towards others as members of a society where suffering is frequent and where provocations are common, where also the inequality of gifts and possessions offers special temptations to men to cherish pride. In view then of the frequent sufferings of humanity, the Apostle bids us put on a heart of compassion; in view of the temptations to exalt ourselves unduly he bids us put on humility, and in view of the frequent provocations we are likely to receive, he bids us put on meekness and longsuffering.

As the elect of God we have to put on a heart of compassion and kindness. Compassion surely is much needed in this world of ours, for it is a world

in which suffering and trial are very rife. They may not indeed always seem conspicuous to us. There are times when we are rather led to think of the wide-spread well-being of men than to note their frequent sorrow and pain. In a bright harvest day, for example, when the ripe corn is falling before the scythe amid the joy of the reapers, our thought is of the rich provision made for men's necessities. In the busy city, as we move through splendid streets and mark the stir that everywhere prevails and the many tokens of wealth about us, our thought is of all that can be accomplished by human energy and skill. Yet, alike in the busy city and in the pleasant country, there are sad hearts and lives burdened by sickness and want. Even on the bright, still, summer day, when ocean stretches away gleaming and unruffled to the far horizon, one hears a kind of melancholy murmur from its waters, a melancholy murmur that speaks of possible tempests and shipwrecks and death. And so, even where men's condition seems happiest and brightest, and the sounds of rejoicing come most frequently to the ear, one may hear a deep undertone of sadness, an undertone that speaks of the sorrows and trials that are absolutely unknown nowhere on earth. And if, my brethren, we live in a world where suffering is so common, how very meet it is that we should put on hearts of compassion, that we should feel with others and help them and comfort them as we can. We should put on kindness in our dealings with all men—that would be meet even in a world

where sorrow was unknown, but we should be specially kind to the poor and the suffering and the neglected, having compassion on them as God has had compassion on us.

Again, as the elect of God we have to put on, to be clothed with, humility. We live in a world where men differ exceedingly in outward circumstances, in mental characteristics, in attainments and in character, and if in any of these things we are even but a little raised above the mass of our fellows it is very easy for us to cherish feelings of pride and self-exaltation. Alas! men do not even need to be in any way superior to their brethren to fall into the sin of pride. It is far from an uncommon thing for men to plume themselves on qualities or attainments which are much more fancied than real. But when men have wealth or position or talent or culture, how easy it is for them to exalt themselves! Nay, when they have a certain formal correctness of behaviour, how easy it is for them to glorify themselves because of that! God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men," said the Pharisee in the temple. Now, it becomes us, as God's elect, to put on, not pride, but humility. Certainly we should not assume humility. There are those who put on the semblance of humility, while their hearts are full of pride. Better than their pretended humbleness of mind is manifest and unconcealed pride. But beautiful is true humility, the absolute forgetfulness of one's gifts or position, the perpetual remembrance that one has nothing which

he has not received. Of that spiritual garment which Christians should wear, no part is more beautiful or becoming than that of humbleness of mind.

Further, as the elect of God we have to put on meekness and long-suffering and readiness to forgive. To many of us meekness is not easy. The answer that springs to our lips is not the soft answer that turneth away wrath, but rather the sharp rejoinder that increases it. And then provocations come to us so often. Men speak harshly to us, deal harshly with us, meet even our patience and kindliness with sullen contempt. What are we to do in these circumstances? What are we to do? What did Christ do? What did He do to the very men who bound Him to the cross? Did He not pray to His Father to forgive them? Nay, what has He done for ourselves? If we are in very truth His, has He not forgiven us? And if we are to put on the new man, if we are to be the true holy ones of God, are we not also to forgive? O! we have not put on the true robe of the royal priesthood, if we have not put on meekness and long-suffering and the spirit of forgiveness.

Finally, as the elect of God, we are to put on love. "And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." Charity, love, is to be the royal robe which we are to put on over all our other spiritual attire, completing what would otherwise be imperfect, or the golden girdle which we are to wear, so as to bind and hold together the spiritual garments which clothe us. Love is the

bond of perfectness, is that which gives unity to character, which harmonises all its separate graces. Indeed, without love we are not complete, nor are the virtues which seem to be in us genuine virtues. Without it our sympathy is hollow, our humility affectation, our meekness mere display. But if we have in very truth put on charity, our sympathy and humility and meekness are of necessity real. We have attained to something like completeness of character if we have put on love.

My brethren, let us put on love. If we are what we profess to be, if we are those who have given their hearts to Christ, then are we God's elect and His beloved. Now, if God has freely given His love to us and forgiven us for Christ's sake, ought we not to love one another? Shall we so freely receive and yet be unwilling to give? O! put on love, I pray you. There are those who cannot be called truly converted men, who yet are in many ways kindly and generous. They are not without sympathy, they are not proud, they are not even unforgiving. Not of the kingdom of God, they yet are not far from that kingdom. Are those who have not yet attained to true discipleship to surpass those who claim to have died with Christ and risen with Him? O! if you are what you profess to be, let the mind be in you which also was in Christ. Put on all the characteristic graces and virtues which belong to the elect of God, His holy and beloved ones, but over all things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

XXIV.

" And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body ; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him."—Colossians iii., 15-17..

IN these words, as in the words which preceded them, St. Paul is speaking to the elect of God. He is indeed only asking of them what he might justly ask of all men, for all men may be justly asked to live a Christian life. But he addresses himself specially to God's people, to His covenanted servants, and calls them to manifest in their lives the reality of their union with Christ. If they are what they profess to be, then are they risen with Christ, and as those who are sharing in Christ's life they should wear a manifest likeness to their living Head. St. Paul has already addressed those to whom he writes as " the elect of God," and here, in our text, he reminds them of their divine election when he says, " To the which also ye are called in one body." And indeed we miss the force of the Apostle's appeals if we do not take them as appeals on the ground of our Christian standing ; nor will these appeals move us much if we are strangers to Christ. You know yourselves whether you have given your hearts to Christ. And if you have in truth done this, then be sure that in our text the Apostle is making a very

special appeal to you, an appeal to which your relation to Christ binds you to pay regard. My friends, if your professions are true you have put on the new man, where Christ is all and in all : you belong to Christ, you are members of Christ ; and you must let your whole lives be redolent of the Spirit of Christ.

In the verses preceding our text we have the manifestation of the new life in its relation to man, to one's neighbour. The elect of God must put on love in its every form in their bearing towards their brethren. In our text we have the new life as manifested in our bearing towards God ; we have at any rate this mainly, although not exclusively. In our text we are assuredly exhorted to live peacefully with each other and to teach and admonish one another, but we are very specially called to be thankful to Him who is God and Father and to live in a spirit of absolute loyalty to Christ. Our thoughts therefore will be mainly about the Christian's bearing towards God. We must not neglect all thought, however, about his bearing towards his fellow-men.

I. Let us note, in the first place, that it becomes the new man to let the peace of Christ rule in his heart.

“ And let the peace of God rule in your hearts.” So we read in the authorised version, but in the revised version we read, “ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,” and this is assuredly the better reading. “ Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you,” said our Lord on that ever memorable night when He said farewell to His disciples. The peace of the Christian is eminently Christ's peace.

Now, regarding this peace which is to rule in our hearts, it is very plain, I think, that it is not, cannot be, that deliverance from condemnation which we call reconciliation to God. Reconciliation to God is indeed peace with God, and this peace with God is the heritage and possession of all believers. But reconciliation to God and the sweet sense of reconciliation are two different although closely connected things. By His death on the cross our Lord reconciled to God all who should in any age believe in Himself, and that reconciliation becomes an actuality for the individual whenever he comes to Christ. The heir to an inheritance comes into actual possession only when the inheritance passes to him, but his title to the inheritance is based on some transaction that may have taken place centuries before. Some remote ancestor may have purchased the possession, or received it as a grant to himself and his heirs for great services to the State. And the believer enters on the blessed possession of reconciliation to God whenever he becomes a believer, but the great work of reconciliation was done by Christ on the cross. By virtue then of what Christ did for him, the believer is one reconciled to God, one at peace with God. That is his position, his standing. But being in this position, having this standing, it is only natural that he should have also the sense, the comforting sense, of the relation which he bears to God. He has, assuredly, at least he ought to have, peace within, felt peace, I mean. And it is, I think, very plain that when St.

Paul says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts," it is not to reconciliation itself, but to the sweet sense of reconciliation, that he is calling us. He is speaking to the reconciled, to those that are risen with Christ, and bidding them rejoice over their sonship, over their blessed relation to God. Nay, he is bidding them do more. He is bidding them be, as the sons of God, without fret or care, bidding them be calm and restful and joyful in their Father's love for them and unfailing interest in them. O ! my friends, we are very ready to yield ourselves to doubts, and anxieties and fears. We have not absolute peace even as to our spiritual standing ; there are hours when comfort seems to flee from us, hours when we scarce dare to hope. And we have hours when our minds are harassed by mere worldly anxieties, when we are cast down and dismayed by earthly trials and difficulties, when we lose heart and think of the future only with dismal forebodings. Like the disciples with their cry to the Master, "Carest Thou not that we perish ?" we are almost ready to think that we are deprived of the divine care. Peace does not rule in our hearts. Yet peace should rule there. We should so rest in the Lord that our souls must rise above fret and care. "Let the peace of Christ," the peace that Christ gives, the peace that He shares with His people, rule in your hearts. Have peace of mind about your souls, knowing in Whom you have believed, and be peaceful even amid distresses and difficulties, knowing Who careth for you. The winds that plough up the surface

of the open sea leave untroubled the sheltered bay. There, even amid the howling of the storm, the mariners may remain without fear. And ye, if ye are Christ's, are where the storm cannot overwhelm you. Let then His peace rule in your hearts.

But when St. Paul speaks in our text of peace I think he is speaking, not only of peace of conscience and minds void of fear and care, but also of peace between man and man. He tells us that we are called to peace in one body, and these words surely mean, not only that the whole body of believers, Christ's mystical body, is called to peace with God, but also that all the members of that body are called to peace with each other. If we are believers indeed, then are we the elect of God, those whom He has chosen and called, and He has called us to union with each other in Christ. How seemly then is it that peace should rule among us! Alas! peace has not ruled in the Church as it should have ruled, does not always rule even among those who worship together. I grant the deep underlying unity of the Church in spite of all its divisions, but the divisions are there, and they are sad to contemplate. They testify that there have been times at least when men studied little the things that make for peace. And are we not ever and again hearing of dissensions in individual congregations, and of bitterness between professing Christian and professing Christian? Brethren, these things ought not to be. We are called to peace. Let the peace to which we are called rule in our hearts. Let us

avoid all bitterness, all dissensions. Whether men worship with us or not, let us treat them as Christian brethren. Let our homes and our Churches be very temples of peace. Let no heart be saddened by any harshness or bitterness of ours, nor our own hearts disturbed by fierce and angry feeling. Let the very bitterness of others leave us without bitterness, and our gentleness meet all harshness hopefully. The peace that is ruling in our own hearts may turn other hearts to peace.

II. Let us note, in the second place, that it becomes the new man, the man that has risen with Christ, to be thankful.

In our text the Apostle insists much on thankfulness. He says, "Be ye thankful." He says again, "Singing with grace," which, so far at least, is "with gratitude," in your hearts to the Lord. And finally he says, "Giving thanks to God and the Father by Him, that is, the Lord Jesus." These last words make it plain to us that when the Apostle says, "Be ye thankful," he is thinking mainly of thankfulness to God. At the same time I do not think that he is excluding the thought of thankfulness to men. Thankfulness is a spirit which, when it is found in a man at all, pervades his whole life. Just as love, when a man comes under the power of it, is, as it were, an atmosphere in which he lives and breathes, so thankfulness is an all-pervading thing in the truly thankful man. The loving man loves both God and his brethren, and the thankful man is thankful in all his ways.

He is touched by human kindness. Even the little services which other men receive as a matter of course affect his heart and move his gratitude. And the greater services, the services which all of us have at times to receive from others, help in severer troubles, comfort amid spiritual distresses, fill his heart with liveliest emotions of thankfulness. But, in truth, his whole bearing to his brethren is that of one who rejoices in having their friendship to cheer and sustain him. I take it then as certain, thankfulness being a habit of life, that when St. Paul says, "Be ye thankful," although he is thinking mainly of thankfulness to God, he is by no means neglecting the thought that we should be thankful to each other. This assuredly we should be. For all the kindnesses shown us by those around us, for all the sympathy that upholds us, for all the Christian fellowship that cheers us, for the very presence of our brethren with us in our acts of worship, and for all the encouragement which that presence brings us, it behoves us to be thankful to them. The new man is a man of thankful spirit.

But, brethren, although we should be thankful to our fellows, we should be specially thankful to God. It is to Him that we should sing with gratitude in our hearts; it is to Him, who is God and Father, that we should give thanks by Jesus Christ. Ingratitude to God is, alas! too common. Men forget to whom they are indebted for their mercies, or, remembering, think that these mercies are only the things to which they are entitled. Yet

gratitude is what every man, be he regenerate or unregenerate, owes to God, for God's mercies come to all men. "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." "Nevertheless," said St. Paul, speaking to a heathen audience, "He left not Himself without witness in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." We have never lacked daily bread, we have had homes to shelter us and friends to cheer us, and our very sufferings and trials have not overwhelmed us. Who is there among us, then, that should be without thankfulness? But if every man should be thankful to God, how fervently and constantly thankful should that man be whom God has forgiven and accepted in the Beloved! "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; Who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies." O! if God is in very truth our God and Father, if we are really reconciled to Him and have passed out of a state of condemnation, what feeling should more completely hold our hearts than the feeling of thankfulness? St. Paul speaks about "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," having most in his thoughts perhaps the Christian assembly, and regarding these psalms and hymns and songs as the means whereby we may edify one another. But it is not simply when we are in the Christian assembly

that we should feel and express our gratitude to God, although in that assembly our psalms should be expressions of thanksgiving as well as instruments of mutual edification. We should always be thankful, and even when we are not singing aloud the divine praise the strain of thanksgiving should be arising from our hearts. Our voices may have little music, but, even so, we can sing, and we ever should sing, with grace in our hearts to the Lord. Let us be ever offering to God through Jesus Christ our sacrifice of praise.

III. Let us now note, in the third place, that it becomes him who has put on the new man to let the word of Christ dwell in him richly, both for his own edification and that of his brethren.

We must remember that when St. Paul wrote his letter to the Christians in Colossae, these Christians were in danger of being beguiled with enticing words, of being led away from the simplicity of the Gospel. There was some one who, although professedly a Christian like themselves, was seeking to teach them something that was very different from the Gospel of Christ. And just because there was a danger of error finding a lodgment among the Colossian Christians, St. Paul was all the more eager to remind them where alone the truth lay and to induce them to hold fast the pure and simple Gospel. Hence he said to them, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." He might indeed have said that had there been no danger of error creeping in; but the fact that that danger threatened made him all the more anxious to remind them that what

they had to cling to and follow was the word of Christ. My brethren, we too need to be earnestly exhorted to let the word of Christ dwell in us, for many other, and often very different, words are offered for our acceptance. There are those who would beguile us with enticing words, who, professing perhaps no little regard for the Gospel, yet by the strange elements which they mix with fragments of Gospel teaching, would practically rob us of the Gospel altogether. We are offered a poor alloy instead of the most pure gold. But because we are offered this, it is well to be reminded that it is the pure gold which we should keep. We have the word of Christ, we have the blessed Gospels, which contain the very words of our salvation: let us not barter them for the mere fancies and speculations of men. But when St. Paul says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," although he says this in view of the fact that there were those who sought to corrupt the Gospel, and in the eager desire that the Gospel in its purity and simplicity might be held fast, he says it also because he would have all Christians to make the Word of Christ their constant companion and guide. My friends, we may hold very orthodox views about Scripture and yet make little true use of Scripture. It is possible for us to be zealous in a way for the divine Word, and yet to be little influenced by that Word. The Apostle would have it to dwell in us richly, would have us to have our minds filled with it and our lives constantly influenced by it. O !

beloved, I pray you to make the Bible your constant companion, to read it much, to study it reverently, to accept its teaching loyally, to mould your lives by it, to seek your consolation from it, to let its words of hope fill your spirits with joy. The man who knows all literature and yet does not in the true sense know the Gospel is ignorant indeed. The man that knows his Saviour's words, knows them so as to love them and live by them, has the best, the most precious knowledge. In the Scripture the living Christ, the Saviour with whom our life is hid, speaks to us. Let His words abide in our hearts. And out of the treasure of Scripture let us seek to enrich not ourselves only but our brethren also. "In all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another." We are "called in one body" and we should be eager to comfort and edify one another. And we do not require to speak in the public assembly to do this. In many a kindly, quiet conversation with each other, in our homes, in Sunday Schools, in ways almost too numerous to mention, we can help and encourage each other in the Christian life. In our text the Apostle seems to allude to one simple way in which we can teach each other. He speaks about "Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." Now, I am not sure that these words ought not to be taken with the words which follow them, so that we should read, "In Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." But generally, as in our own Bibles, the words, "Psalms and hymns and

spiritual songs," are linked with the words before them, "Teaching and admonishing one another." The composing of hymns began very early in the Christian Church, and probably many a brother who did not preach sought to edify and encourage others by some sacred song breathing forth the spirit of loyalty and devotion to Christ. To this too St. Paul may allude. But, be this as it may, it is possible for us to encourage each other by the fervour and heartiness of our praise. Let us but sing as those whose hearts are filled with love to our Saviour, and we shall cheer and strengthen each other as we sing.

IV. But we must now note, in the last place, that it becomes him who has put on the new man to be in everything devoutly loyal to Christ.

"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." In these words the Apostle sums up for us all that can be said about the Christian life. The details of Christian living are very many, and St. Paul himself is careful to dwell on these details, but ultimately everything that belongs to Christian duty resolves itself into simple loyalty and devotion to the Saviour. In this Epistle to the Colossians St. Paul sets forth in the most earnest and emphatic way the glory of our Redeemer. He says of Him that He is the image of the invisible God, that by Him all things were created, that He is before all things, that by Him all things consist, and that He is the Head of the body, the Church. Now, surely to one so exalted and glorious utmost homage is due, and St. Paul asks

for Him the homage that is due to Him. He asks that to Him who is the Head of the body the entire submission of each member of the body should be given, that in every word and deed regard should be had to His will. To do a thing in the name of Christ is to do it in acknowledgment of His authority, to do it because He would have it done. And he is the most Christian man who preserves in all things a regard for the will of his Lord and Master and lives in the most inviolate fidelity to Him. When in every word which we speak and in every deed which we do we have regard to the will of Jesus, our Lord, then are we living the new life, the life of those that are risen with Christ. It is vain to call ourselves Christians if we have not a supreme and unchanging loyalty to Christ. Not only must we rest on Him as the Saviour who died for us, not only must we present our supplications and offer our thanksgivings through Him as the High Priest who represents us before God, but we must also listen to Him as the Sovereign Lord, every behest of Whom it is ours to obey. My brethren, let us learn this entire regard for the authority of Christ, this constant loyalty, this unflinching devotion to Him. Let us be not men and women whose lives are but formally correct, but devoted subjects and servants of Christ, who have but one object, one aim, the carrying out of their Master's will. Our Lord lives and reigns, and we approve ourselves as His when His mind is in us, and when whatsoever we do in word and deed we do in His name.

XXV.

“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. Servants, obey in all things your masters, according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wroug which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons. Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal: knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.”—Colossians iii., 18, to iv., 1.

WHEN St. Paul and Silas were preaching the Gospel at Thessalonica, certain unbelieving Jews said of them, “Those that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.” Now, there was a sense in which the Apostles turned the world upside down. They awoke it from its long spiritual sleep, they stirred it to a care for the unseen, they set before it new ideals, they called men away from its idol temples; but only in this sense were they revolutionaries. They did not aim at political changes, and they did not seek to disturb the existing family life. They took the State and the family as they found them: they sought to make their conditions purer and holier, but that was all. Our text shows that the Apostles did nothing more. They found slavery in existence, they doubtless hated it, they laid down the principles which could not but lead to its extinction, but they did not call

slaves everywhere to disobey or desert their masters. To have done so would have been to provoke a revolution, and this they had no desire to do. They only called slaves to be obedient and masters just. Very likely many a Christian master came to see that justice to his slave meant giving him his liberty, but there was no express command that he should do so. The servants mentioned in our text were really bond-servants, but St. Paul does not demand their immediate liberation. He wants the social order sweetened and purified, not all existing conditions immediately changed. Now, I am very far from thinking that the Christian man may not work for social and political changes, changes which he honestly believes would be highly beneficial. But all such changes usually come slowly, and it is wisdom, it seems to me, to try to make the best of existing conditions. The household, it seems to men brought up with modern ideas of freedom, could never have been ideal while slavery in any form existed, but even, while it existed, its conditions could have been made tolerable. And St. Paul desired that they should be made so. He took the household just as it was, a household with parents and children and bond-servants, and sought to guide all its members into a loving and gracious bearing towards each other. Now, slavery has long since ceased to exist in our land, and happily is dying out everywhere. There are no bond-servants now in Christian homes. But just as it was a meet thing that the various members of the household in Apostolic days should do their

best in existing circumstances, always of course desiring that a better order should come in, so is it a meet thing that the various members of the household in our days should strive to fulfil well their parts in that happier order which now exists.

In our meditations on the text we shall follow the division which it itself suggests, considering, first, the mutual duties of husbands and wives; secondly, the mutual duties of parents and children, and, in the last place, the mutual duties of masters and servants. Our thoughts will be concerned about the Christian household in its ideal state.

I. Let us consider the mutual duties of husbands and wives.

I have said husbands and wives, but St. Paul speaks of the duties of wives first. "Wives," he says, "submit yourselves to your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord." "Submit yourselves to your own husbands." Is this all, some one may ask, that the Apostle has to offer by way of counsel to married women, to those whose duties are so important, to those on whom the happiness of the home so greatly depends? He bids husbands love their wives, and in the Epistle to the Ephesians even counsels them to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. But he says nothing here about love from the wife to the husband, nothing about gentleness or amiability, nothing about the goodness of care for others—speaks only of submission. Was this because he thought love less necessary on the part of the wife than on that of the husband?

Assuredly, no. We may be very certain that St. Paul desired that mutual love should regulate the whole bearing towards each other of husbands and wives. But he took for granted, we may believe, the love of the wife toward the husband, and only asked that this love should manifest itself in a gentle submission. The Apostle recognised that in every household some one must rule, else must there be only that confusion which comes from a house divided against itself, and he saw that the natural head of the household was he on whom lay the responsibility of providing for the household's needs. Yet we may be sure that he did not encourage an ungentle rule or wish the submission that was only a yielding to necessity. Between two people, one of whom has the right to expect and the other the duty to bestow a certain measure of obedience, much friction may arise through unbending imperiousness on the one side and unbending wilfulness on the other. St. Paul would have all such friction removed as between husbands and wives. He would have the requirements of the one reasonable, the compliance of the other ready. He is thinking of a Christian household, and he enjoins husbands and wives to bear themselves to each other as Christians. You note that when he says, "Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands," he adds the words, "As it is fit in the Lord." Practically he bids the wife, as a Christian woman, recognise in her husband the head and protector whom God has given her, and be eager to give him all the help and cheer and support which it

is meet that he should receive. Of course we can conceive circumstances in which a wife would be justified in refusing submission, but St. Paul is laying down a general rule and not dealing with exceptions, and the rule is that a wife should try to be as far as possible one in will with her husband, and not by opposing and thwarting him to destroy a household's peace.

But if it is the wife's part to offer to her husband an unselfish and gracious submission, the submission of a loving companion and friend who yet recognises her husband as her head, it is the husband's part to be neither imperious nor unreasonable, but loving and thoughtful in the highest degree. "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." It seems almost strange that such a counsel should be needed, considering how close is the bond that binds husband and wife together. "The two shall be one flesh." If such is, in very truth, the relation between husband and wife, then one would think that there should be no need to bid husbands love their wives. But, alas! the Apostle's counsel is needed, for many men are far less loving, gentle and considerate to their wives than they ought to be. Perhaps those who are wholly without affection for those whom they should cherish as their own flesh are comparatively few, but there are only too many who are inconsiderate, impatient, and difficult to please. In most households the cares of the wife and mother are very many, and this should lead to her being treated with utmost consideration and tenderness. Let us see that this is the rule in our homes.

Constant complaints and bitter words do but destroy the beauty of home life, as angry winds break the flower stems and scatter the fair petals on the ground. No Christian man should treat with other than utmost patience and gentleness her who by God's ordinance has been made one with himself.

II. We now consider, in the second place, the mutual duties of parents and children.

The Apostle speaks to the children first, and asks of them but one thing, assuring them, however, that the constant doing of that one thing is very good in the divine eyes. "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord."

Of course he is mainly speaking to children while they are still in their parents' homes. It is the Christian household with parents, children and servants that he is contemplating when he gives the counsels of our text. There comes a time of course when it would be unwise of parents to demand or expect implicit obedience from their children, but surely there should never come a time in any one's life when the loving and kindly counsels of his or her parents should be disregarded. And while the children of the house are still literally children, implicit and loving obedience is undoubtedly their part. "Obey your parents in all things." If divided counsels, as between husbands and wives, breed only confusion and disaster, what but sorest wretchedness can be in the home where children habitually disregard their parents' will? Unfortunately there are foolish parents, neglectful parents,

even harsh and cruel parents, parents who behave so badly to their offspring that society has to take the control of their children out of their hands. But these are very exceptional parents, and, as I have said, St. Paul is dealing, not with exceptional cases, but with what is general and normal. And the general rule is that parents love their children very deeply and sincerely and are very eager for their good. And there are few parents, even if far from perfect themselves, who are not eager that their children should do well, and who would command them to do things that they did not believe to be good. I would say to all children then, Obey your parents: honour your father and mother: do not set your young wills against theirs. Your parents love you, watch over you, provide for you, deny themselves many things that it may go well with you. Your parents have more wisdom than you can have, know best what is for your good, and are anxious that you should do all that is best. Nay, more, God, who knows all that is best, has commanded you to obey your parents, and promised a blessing to the obedient. And Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour of all, of the children as well as of those who have come to riper years, was Himself an obedient son, and a pattern of what all children should be. Children, then, obey your parents, doing, not grudgingly, but graciously, what they command you. Doing so you will be preparing for after days, days in which you will often find that you cannot have your own way: and above all you will be

pleasing, not your parents only, though you will please them, but also the blessed Lord himself, Whom all of us should be eager to please.

But, if the children owe obedience to their parents, the parents owe patience and gentleness to their children. "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." These words do not mean, of course, that parents are never to rebuke their children for their faults or to chastise them when they have done anything seriously wrong; but they do mean that parents are not to be harsh and impatient and ever finding fault. Many parents, in spite of their very genuine love for their children, are unduly severe, forget that they are dealing, not with grown men and women, but with those whose faculties are yet undeveloped and who are moved not a little by impulse. They expect too much from them, and chide them unreasonably. Now, the way of wisdom is to be very patient, to be very gentle, to speak as many encouraging words as possible, and to make it plain that even when one has to be severe one is not unloving. It is a sad thing to see a discouraged child, a child who feels as if it could never do aught to please its parents, a child who seems to have no buoyancy or joyousness, and no child should be like that. Parents, endeavour to keep your children in control, but strive to make their lives bright and hopeful. Blessed is the home where the presence of the parents is as sunshine around the children, for such a home is a great joy for the present and a precious object for the memory to treasure in all after

days. May such be the character of all our homes!

III. Let us now consider, in the third place, the mutual duties of masters and servants.

As St. Paul spoke to wives before speaking to husbands, and to children before speaking to parents, so here he speaks to servants before speaking to masters. "Servants, obey in all things," he says, "your masters, according to the flesh."

I have said that in St. Paul's own time the servants were not free persons, disposing of their work for wages, but bondsmen and bondswomen, the property of their masters. Of course they received some recompense for their toil, and in many cases they in the end obtained their freedom, but it was rather to the bond than the free that St. Paul was writing. Personally I detest slavery and count it one of the most hateful institutions that ever existed, but I am well aware that it was very long before its odiousness impressed the world in general. The one thing that can be said, not in its favour, but as a slight minimising of its hatefulness, is that the bondsman was reckoned in a way as one of the household, and was often treated with kindness. Still, the institution was radically bad. But even in an order of things that is itself far from being ideally good men may act nobly and worthily, and St. Paul called even the bondsmen to adorn their lowly positions by honest and faithful doing of duty. Their masters were only their masters according to the flesh, there was no divine order in slavery; yet, in the course of providence, they were

their masters and obedience was due to them. But indeed the Apostle lifts the whole matter of service out of the level of mere common things, and puts it into the realm of the spiritual. He is writing to bondsmen, but to Christian bondsmen, to the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he calls them to remember that they are so, and to do their common work as if it were done for their divine Master. It was easy in a way to do eye-service, but St. Paul called the Christian servants to whom he wrote to do no eye-service merely, but, as serving Christ, to do their whole duty in singleness of heart. They might or they might not be treated justly by their masters: let them be little heedful of that, but greatly heedful of doing what was right. Their heavenly Master knew all their case. Were they faithful to their duty, He would not forget their faithfulness: were they wronged, the time would come when all their wrongs would be righted by Him: He, with Whom there was no respect of persons, would judge fairly between master and servant. Their part was to do their work in singleness of heart and honestly, careful to please God.

Now, however, that social conditions have so much changed, and that masters are simply employers, and workers are free to accept or refuse offered employment, how does St. Paul's counsel, "Servants, obey in all things your masters," apply? Surely only with greater force. If it was meet that the bondsman should obey, surely still more is it meet that the free man or woman who works for stipulated

recompense should do that which it was agreed should be done. Many of us are in one sense at least servants. I myself am your servant for Christ's sake, and it becomes us all to serve, not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God. But the Apostle is thinking specially of the household, and we may regard his counsel as specially addressed to those who serve in the house. And still is his counsel worthy of being regarded by such. It is good that they should think of themselves as of the house, should interest themselves in its well-being, and, for the sake of Christ, do all their duty with singleness and readiness of heart.

But if those who serve are to serve loyally, how are those who employ to act? They are to act with justice and fairness, to treat their servants with a due recognition of their equality in God's sight, and ever to bear themselves towards them as knowing that they themselves have a Master in heaven. There are many people who expect others to fulfil very faithfully whatever duties they owe to them, without being at all careful to fulfil their own obligations. It behoves us all to be eager to do to all men the things which they may rightly demand of us. And, if there are any over whom our position, as it were, gives us a certain advantage, we should only be the more eager to act with utmost fairness by them. Hence all employers of labour should be scrupulously careful to deal justly and considerately with those whom they employ, to expect of them indeed honest dealing, but never in

any way to harass or oppress them. But again I say that in our text St. Paul is thinking mainly of the Christian household, and the masters whom he specially addresses are the masters of the house. Such masters he reminds that they themselves have a Master in heaven, a Master to whom they are responsible for every action, a Master whom all oppression or injustice on their part must displease. And for the sake of that Master he calls them to deal justly and kindly with those who serve them. I say justly and kindly, for one hardly gives to his servants that which is just and equal when he contents himself with giving them the wages for which they have wrought. Those who employ others should remember that they are dealing with men and women with souls as precious as their own, dealing with those whom God regards just as He regards them. Hence masters and mistresses should treat those, who for the time being are in the house, just as if they were of the house, should care for their well-being, temporal and spiritual. Too often it is far otherwise, and servants come and go and those who employ them hardly know them. Let us, if we have others than our own children in our homes, treat those others with kind and loving regard.

Brethren, let us be sure that we have Christ with us in the house, and that all our dealings with each other are regulated by a holy regard for His will. Above all, let the spirit of our households be a Christian and loving spirit, each seeking the good of all the others for Christ's dear sake.

XXVI.

"Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak." —Colossians iv., 2-4.

CHRISTIANS are not the only people who pray. The practice of prayer is universal. I do not mean, of course, that every human being prays or at least prays habitually. Even in Christian lands there are very many who never, or only in the most exceptional circumstances, lift up the voice of supplication. Yet, over all the world men pray to some invisible power, to the one God or to the many. So natural is it for men to pray that even professed infidels have been heard in times of trouble and danger calling upon God to aid them.

While, however, it is so common among men to ask the divine aid, it is, alas! only in times of trouble that many of them do so. We should pray without ceasing. Of course it is not wrong to go to God with one's distresses. We are distinctly encouraged to do so. It is written, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me," and again, "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." But while it is not wrong for men to ask God's help amid their distresses, it is not seemly that any one's time of trouble should be his only time of prayer. One should pray amid the sunshine as well as under the storm-clouds, should

pray when the surface of life's sea is calm and tranquil, as well as when billow bounds on after billow and the air is filled with the voices of the storm. Prayer should indeed be a habit with us all, a habit growing only stronger from day to day. "Continue in prayer," says the Apostle, "and watch in the same." And our prayers should be, not for ourselves only, but for others as well. In our text St. Paul asks the prayers of the Colossian Christians for himself, and doing so reminds us that it is meet that our brethren should not be forgotten by us when we draw near to God. Most men who do pray remember their own friends and kindred in their prayers, and some of the most earnest prayers offered up are prayers offered up for dear ones in distress. Now, it is never amiss that one praying should pray for his own, never amiss that when one's own are in distress he should entreat God for them. We know how many came to our Saviour asking His gracious aid for those dear to them, and how lovingly He responded to their appeals. But it is not for our own simply that we should pray. We should pray for all men: we should specially pray for the Church and for the steady and rapid spread of the Gospel, and we should never forget to pray for the afflicted. We should continue in prayer, in prayer for a divine blessing on ourselves indeed, but never on ourselves only. And our prayers should not be supplications merely, but thanksgivings as well. Ten lepers came to be healed, but only one returned to Christ to return thanks for healing. Too often men who

have besought some desired good with passionate entreaties forget to render thanks when what they have asked has been granted them. Our prayers should be grateful prayers. "Watch in the same with thanksgiving."

In our meditations on our present text we consider, in the first place, the Apostle's counsel regarding prayer, and, in the second place, his request to those following his counsel.

I. We consider, in the first place, the Apostle's counsel regarding prayer.

He says, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." The emphatic word in this counsel is, I think, undoubtedly the word, "Continue," but the whole utterance is important and illuminative.

Evidently St. Paul esteemed prayer a very important thing in the Christian life, otherwise he would not have so often counselled the Christian converts to whom he wrote to continue in it. He assuredly was not one to repress the instinctive tendency of men to pray. There are people who try to persuade us that there is no reason why we should pray. They tell us that the order of the universe is so fixed, that the chain of causes and effects is so firmly welded, that it is vain for us to pray. Events must happen in a certain way, and no praying of ours can have any influence upon them. Now, were this absolutely true, it would still be good to pray. For prayer need not be simply the asking for this or that desired blessing. Surely prayer should be

largely communion with God, a childlike opening of the heart to Him, and this there could be even although no special favour was besought. Beyond this, surely it could not be other than fitting to pray for a right frame of spirit in which to receive God's dealings with us. Unless we are to cut off all living connection whatever between God and His human creatures, even the man who believed that all the experiences through which he should pass were already fixed might ask to be enabled to meet these experiences in a right spirit. Even then were we to believe that everything is so ordered that it is vain for us to ask this or that desired boon or blessing, there would still be meetness in prayer. But I do not believe that God cannot so use His own laws as to answer our prayers for mercies and blessings which we need. Much that we do need comes to us through the instrumentality of our fellow-men. Cannot God move their hearts and incline their wills to care for us? But, quite apart from this, God holds all the forces of the universe in His hands and, working ever according to law, can still, even thus working, answer our supplications. Of course in all our requests we should have a regard to the divine will. Asking, we should only ask to have as He sees fit to grant. But, having always a regard to His will, there is no care or anxiety of ours which we may not bring before Him. We are His children, and we may go to Him in all our bodily distresses and in all our spiritual cares, believing that we cannot go to Him in vain.

Now, St. Paul recognised the importance of prayer in the Christian life and, doing so, counselled the Colossian Christians, and through them all Christians, to continue in it. I have said that it is no uncommon thing for men to pray in seasons of trial and distress, but these are not the only seasons when they should do so. Prayer should be our daily exercise, and we should pray, not at stated times only, but often, and this though our prayer on many occasions should be but a brief sentence. Indeed, we should be always in a prayerful spirit, waiting on God and trusting in Him and in our Saviour. In another of his Epistles St. Paul bids us pray without ceasing, and this must mean that we are to live in constant communing with Him, in unfailing trust in Him, and with many an earnest word of supplication addressed to Him. We must continue in prayer. How many are neglectful of it! The voice of prayer is not heard in their homes, where in the midst of the household it should rise with unfailing regularity. Even private prayer is often forgotten, and men go forth to their labours without commanding themselves to God for the day and lie down to sleep without asking the Holy One of Israel, who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth, to watch over them through the silent night. Then again, how many are variable in their religious frame, pious seemingly at one time and careless and worldly at another. Now, we must not grow weary in well-doing, and we must not be inconstant and variable. We must continue in prayer, in public

prayer, in family prayer, above all in private prayer. The spiritual life assuredly decays, as droops the herbage unrefreshed by dew or rain, when we do not wait upon God. We must continue in prayer, and not only continue in it, but persevere in it, praying and not fainting.

But the prayer in which we continue must not be mere formal prayer. It is possible to pray often and yet not to pray earnestly ; it is possible to have stated hours of prayer and yet to make prayer the most formal thing possible, a matter of the merest routine. Many are satisfied with simply saying their prayers, deeming that having done so they have fulfilled their duty. It is not in the offering of mere formal prayers that St. Paul bids us continue. He calls us to utmost earnestness. “Continue in prayer,” he says, “and watch in the same.” Now, these words, “Watch in the same,” may be taken as equivalent to our Lord’s words, “Watch and pray,” by which they were probably suggested. We have to watch at all times, surrounded as we are by countless spiritual dangers. But while we have to combine watching with praying, it is perhaps not of watching in the strict sense that St. Paul is speaking when he says, “Watch in the same.” He means, I fancy, that we should be, as it were, awake and attentive in our devotions. Our prayers should be the prayers of those spiritually aroused, of those deeply concerned, not of dreamers, not of mere listless utterers of a form of words. It is no worshipping of God in spirit and in truth to repeat without living

interest even the most beautiful and pious words. We watch or wake in prayer when our souls thirst for God, even the living God.

St. Paul completes his counsel to us regarding prayer by bidding us unite thanksgiving with supplication. "Watch in the same with thanksgiving." The prayers of many are, as it were, but wails, cries of grief and of distress. Now, I have already said that it is quite meet that as children of the Heavenly Father we should bring all our cares and troubles before Him. But surely it is not meet that we should have nothing in our prayers but utterances of sadness and anxiety. Our prayers should be thankofferings as well as supplications. The thought of all that God has done for us, above all the thought of the love that He has shown us in giving us His unspeakable gift, should make our prayers outpourings of gratitude and joy. God always loves His people, loves them even in the hours of their sorest distress, and they should never fail to remember His goodness and give Him heartiest praise.

"Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." Believe me, dear brethren, there is no life so sweet or blessed as the prayerful life. Even a true and pure human friendship has its influence in making one's life richer and sweeter. How much more must life be beautified and ennobled and purified when one is living in close, sweet fellowship with God! I am not urging that we should pray simply in order that of God's bounty we may receive certain boons on which we have set our

hearts. I am urging that we should pray because I am sure that only as we do so in all sincerity can we attain the true life. After all, the great thing is noble living. It is comparatively of small moment what we have, but it is of infinite moment what we are. And because it is only in communion with God and with our Saviour that we can attain life's true beauty and worth, I urge you to continue in earnest, believing, persevering, grateful prayer.

II. Let us now consider, in the second place, what the Apostle requests from those following his counsel.

He requests for his fellow-workers and for himself an interest in the believers' prayers.

I have said, my friends, that we should never pray for ourselves only. Men may be selfish in their very prayers, asking blessings only for themselves. We should be eager that, not ourselves only, but our brethren also, should be blessed.

We should pray for our own. Between them and us there subsists a natural relationship which should make their interests, as it were, our interests. But, indeed, I believe that most men who pray at all do pray for their own, and St. Paul does not in our text bid us pray for our households and kindred, deeming doubtless that nature should teach us so to do. But while we pray for our own, we should not forget others. We should indeed pray for all men, pray for peace on earth, pray for the wide and rapid spread of the Gospel. Above all we should pray for the afflicted, for those who have to bear heavy burdens

of sorrow and trial and care. And never in our prayers should we forget the labourers in the Lord's vineyard. We should remember them for their work's sake. It is to prayers in behalf of those engaged in the work of preaching the Gospel that St. Paul specially alludes in our text. "Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak."

"Withal praying also for us," that is, for St. Paul and Timothy and doubtless also for all those engaged with them in the work of preaching the Gospel. The ministers of the Word and the missionaries who have gone down into the dark places of heathendom should be very specially remembered in believers' prayers. But why, some one may say, should they have special mention. Are they different from other men, are their burdens heavier, are their souls more precious? Not so, but they have a work to do so difficult and so important that prayer should unceasingly be made in their behalf. The great instrumentality which God has appointed for the moral and spiritual elevation of men is the preaching of the Word. "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Preaching may seem a small thing; evidently there were some in St. Paul's time who called it foolishness; yet is it God's instrument for the conversion of the world.

And because of the important connection which preaching has with men's salvation, it behoves all who desire to see a spiritually renewed humanity to pray for those who labour in word and doctrine, that they may be faithful, true and earnest in their work, and that their work may be blessed. And, while prayer should be made for all preachers, undoubtedly special prayer should be made for those whose work is most trying and difficult, as was, for example, that of St. Paul and Timothy at Rome. "Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance."

And surely, when prayer is made for all ministers and missionaries, it is fitting that praying men and women should bear in their supplications to God the name of him who labours among themselves. St. Paul asks the prayers of the Colossian Christians for himself. Strictly speaking he was not their minister. It has been generally held that he had never visited Colossae. Yet he was the Apostle of the Gentiles, and if he had not preached personally to the Colossians he had sent forth those who had done so. He stood in a close relationship to these converts from among the Gentiles and he sought to be remembered in their prayers. His position was a trying one, for he was in bonds for speaking the mystery of Christ, in bonds, that is, for preaching a free Gospel to all men. Would they not then pray for him, pray that, if it were the will of God, he might be once more free to go from city to city and from land to land, having a door of utterance open

to him wherever he went, and, if it were not the will of God that he should be delivered from his bonds, that he might yet be enabled, even in captivity, to make manifest the mystery of Christ ? And surely, friends, if the dauntless and inspired Apostle felt that he needed men's prayers, may not all ministers feel that they need the prayers of their people. My brethren, I entreat you to pray for me. It would give me new strength and courage for my work, if I knew that you continued to remember me at the throne of grace.

Let me close by urging you to continue in prayer. Find time for drawing near to God. Amid the fret and worry of the world there is one place of rest and calm. It is the closet, where with shut door the Christian prays to the Father, Who is in secret.

XXVII.

"Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time."—Colossians iv., 5.

THE "persons without," towards whom St. Paul exhorted the Colossian Christians to walk in wisdom, were the heathens and unconverted Jews. The Colossian Church was mainly a Church of Gentiles, and was planted in a very superstitious heathen land.

That the Phrygians in general were morally worse than the people of surrounding heathen lands does not appear; but they had all the common sins of heathenism and they had an immense amount of superstition. The new converts at this Phrygian city of Colossae had therefore to come more or less into contact daily with men who were living as most heathens lived, and who were more given to superstition than most heathens were. They had moreover to come into frequent contact with unconverted Jews, who were always glad of any opportunity to rail against the Gospel. Situated thus, they require the greatest circumspection and wisdom. A lack of wisdom on their part was sure to prove most hurtful to themselves and most obstructive to the advancement of Christianity among the heathen and the Jews around them. Hence it was that St. Paul affectionately exhorted them to walk in wisdom toward them that were without. Now, the counsel that St. Paul gave to the Colossians he left for us, and we ought to give most earnest heed to the

following of it. In meditating on that counsel let us consider, in the first place, the “persons without,” towards whom we ought to walk in wisdom; in the second place, the need of walking in wisdom towards them that are without, and, in the last place, the extreme diligence in good which should mark our walk, because opportunity passes so quickly away.

I. Let us consider, in the first place, the persons without, towards whom we should walk in wisdom. When I say “we,” I speak of Christians generally, but in a special way of ourselves.

The Colossians had heathens and Jews as those without; we have heathens and Jews and men of no religious profession, or at least with no definite Christian connection.

The heathen of many lands are brought into contact with our countrymen. Our ships are on every sea, our empire is scattered over all parts of the habitable globe. Beneath India’s burning sun our British soldiers are guarding the possessions of their island-home: under gentler Australian skies British subjects are creating for themselves new homes in which the memories of their mother-country will be preserved: in Africa and in America millions think of England as their own land still. Nor is it only where the British flag floats and Britain’s power is supreme that our fellow-countrymen are to be found. They are toiling in great American cities or clearing great American forests; they are trading with the dusky sons of China and the swarthy sons of Africa; they are seeking the rewards of

daring and industry amidst the Eden-like islands of the broad Pacific. Everywhere the Englishman—soldier, sailor, trader, traveller, toiler—is coming in contact with heathenism. The Indian of the East and the Indian of the West, the Australian, the Chinaman, the Negro, the Polynesian, all know him, and all more or less judge of his religion through him. Brethren, in this excited, stirring, wandering age, what one of us, at least of the younger of us, can be sure that heathen men and heathen rites will not come under his own personal cognizance, that the heathen will not one day be to him among those without, towards whom his religion will require him to walk in wisdom ?

And do we not too, even as did the Colossians of old, find the sons of Abraham among those that are without us ? They are in our cities, but not of us, not mingling with us as brethren, not joining with us in our religious observances. And yet, although we very rarely think about them, I have no doubt that they are watching our ways and judging of our Christian religion through us.

But the men of no Church are also to be reckoned, so far as concerns us, among those that are without. Alas! my brethren, that they should be so very numerous.

Amongst them there are the secularists and infidels, men to whom the Gospel is but a mockery. I do not think, indeed, that secularists, although a very noisy, are an excessively large section of the community. Yet they are only too numerous and

they are to be found everywhere. There may be honest men among them, but they are doing a most unhallowed work, a work of sorrow and ruin. Now, these secularists watch professing Christians and draw conclusions from their lives. They judge of Christians not so much from the written record as from living men. And, judging from men, they profess themselves openly to be the opponents of Christ. But the secularists are not the only persons that, in relation to us as professing Christians, are without. There are many that are without that do not profess secularism or atheism, but that yet will not profess Christ. They may enter a Church occasionally, they may glance at the Bible occasionally, they may sometimes speak a respectful word regarding the Saviour. But they have no active sympathy with Christianity, they count religion as in a large measure hypocrisy, they certainly will make no profession of being on Christ's side. You must know many such persons, my brethren, profligate enough some of them, and others of them not specially so, but all of them heedless and godless, all of them ready enough to mark any error or failing on the part of professing Christians, all of them ready enough to say that they that profess nothing and are not religious are very much the same as those that do profess to be Christ's.

And, furthermore, amongst those that so far as concerns us, professing Christians, are without, are all those that have grown up in ignorance of all religious ordinances and almost all religious truth. It is one

of the most awful things possible to think of the multitudes in this land of ours that grow up and live and die in direst ignorance : that know God's name but to blaspheme it, and His day but to profane it. What man or woman can think without tears of children that have never known what it was to utter a prayer at a mother's knee ; of grown up people that have never read a chapter of the Bible ; of old people dying that scarcely know that there is a Saviour ! And yet in our land there is scarcely a large town whose narrowest streets and dingiest lanes do not contain multitudes of those that have been born in an atmosphere of Gospel ignorance, and are living in the same atmosphere still. Ah ! in this town of ours, blessed above many towns in the matter of houses of prayer, what vast multitudes there are that are utterly ignorant about their heavenly Father and their Saviour ! I fear all of us Christian people are much to blame in the matter.

II. Let us now consider, in the second place, the need of walking in wisdom towards them that are without.

How needful it is will appear from this, that those that are without judge of Christians, as I have already said, mainly from the behaviour of professing Christians. It may be said that it is not fair to do so, that men should take the Bible and examine it for themselves, rather than judge of the Christian religion from the behaviour of the persons that profess to be Christians. It may be urged that, as it would not be fair to judge of the laws of a country from

the breakers of those laws, so it is not just to judge of the Christian religion from the behaviour of those that profess to be followers of that religion. Now, there is truth in all this. The excellence of the Bible is not affected by the behaviour of those that unfaithfully profess to love it. It is God's book and the perfect law of righteousness, although many that profess to love it really act contrary to its teaching. It should be judged on its own merits and not through the behaviour of those that profess to be guided by it. But, at the same time, it is by no means unnatural that men should be influenced in their judgments about a religion from the behaviour of those that profess that religion, especially if they first become acquainted with the professors of that religion, and afterwards are asked to examine the religion and accept it. It is not unnatural that the temperate Mohammedan, being asked to accept Christ, should say that he sees professing Christians degrade themselves by intemperance: it is not unnatural that the South American Indians, known to be a moral race, on hearing the Missionaries calling them to be Christians should say that many professing Christians are horribly immoral in their lives: it is not unnatural that certain secularists, scrupulously fair in their dealings, should, on being reasoned with to give up their secularism, say that many professing Christians are ready to take advantage of the weaknesses of their neighbours. Nay, it is not unnatural that heathen, secularist, and outcast, however vile their lives, should, on being pressed to receive the

Gospel, say that their lives are not a whit worse than the lives of many that make the most abundant professions of faith in Christ. The truth is, my friends, that, say what we may, we shall never get those that are without to accept the Gospel or to honour the Gospel till we that are within ourselves walk in wisdom, till we live the Gospel. If professing Christians were all that they ought to be, and were all that some of them already are, they would very mightily advance the Gospel. But just because so many professing Christians are nothing more than professors, just because they are hearers of the Word and not doers thereof, the Gospel is blasphemed of many and rejected of more. In the Gospel there is every possible excellence ; there has been no duty enjoined by man that is not enjoined in the Gospel. Love, forgiveness of injuries, gentleness, temperance, honesty, truthfulness, purity : the Bible enjoins them all. But because so many professing Christians are false to their professions, some men forget what the Bible is and speak evil of it : and others, that do not actually speak evil of the Bible, yet fancy that they can do as well without it. Considering, therefore, that the lack of wise walking on the part of professing Christians results in leading many to speak evil of the Bible, and in keeping others from accepting Christ : and, considering also, that the lack of wise walking tends to the constantly growing degradation of the professing Christian, it is manifest that there is the most urgent need why we should, as professing Christians, walk in wisdom towards them that are

without. Those that are without have a claim upon those that are within, a very strong claim indeed. St. Paul said of himself that he was debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians; and he said so, not because Greek or Barbarian had done aught for him, in one sense at least, but because he possessed that which neither Greek nor Barbarian had, namely, a knowledge of the Gospel, and possessing that was bound to impart it to those that possessed it not. There is no one of us on whom other men have not some claim or other. If we are either temporally or spiritually better situated than many of our brethren, then do we owe to them that we help them according to the measure of our power. Therefore, to them that are without do we owe it that we walk in wisdom toward them or, in other words, that we do nothing to bar them from accepting the Gospel, but everything to induce them to accept it. And to ourselves also do we owe it that we walk in wisdom toward them that are without, because all neglect of such walking very rapidly assimilates us to them that are without.

But if it be here asked what is this walking in wisdom which is so encumbent on us, I remark that it is walking in abstinence from evil, walking in the practice of good, and walking in a way of earnest endeavour to induce those without to come within.

We are bound to walk in abstinence from evil. Many professing Christians are extremely thoughtless, extremely easily led away. They are very ready to fall into the ways of those that are without, to

join them in their sins and follies, to do the things that they do. And they are extremely well pleased if they are complimented by those that are without on their liberality of behaviour and freedom from stiff and rigid notions. But, my brethren, remember that men who compliment professing Christians on that liberality which but consists in sin are drawn to love the Gospel less from marking that very behaviour of its professed followers which they do compliment. If we do not want to make the Gospel despised in the eyes of those that are without, we must see to it that we mingle not with these persons in vain pursuits, and in sin. We must abstain from intemperance, from sensuality, from covetousness, from dishonesty, from revenge, from evil speaking of every kind. If we do not abstain from those things, then by so much the more we do them, by as much we hinder the progress of the Gospel. But, besides, we are bound to be actively virtuous before them that are without. They must see us, not simply keeping from evil, but actually doing good. Are they heathen? Then they must not see us less mindful of the true God's worship than they are of the worship of false gods. Are they secularists?—They must not see us lagging in schemes of benevolence and public spirited charity, in which they are leading. Are they persons that, without professing scepticism, yet do not profess anything like religion?—They must not see us less large-hearted than they are themselves. Are they persons that are of no Church, because they have been brought up in want and

ignorance?—They must not see us less neighbourly and gentle than they are themselves. Towards those that are without we must be full of such kind offices as lie in our power, and they must see us devout, benevolent, honest, unworldly, self-denying, truthful, full of pure and godly words and deeds.

And, besides all this, in walking in wisdom toward them that are without we must take all active measures we can for their conversion. It is a fatal and foolish error to think that there is no urgent reason why we should specially interest ourselves in the spiritual welfare of others. If we are bound to live purely, lest we should hinder any of them from accepting the Gospel, much more surely are we bound to press the acceptance of it on them. If we care not to strive to induce others to believe, we either are strangely selfish or care little for the Gospel ourselves.

Wherever we are then, brethren, whether in foreign lands or in our own land: whether the men around us, observing our behaviour and judging of our religion from us, are heathens, or sceptics, or men careless about religion, or men that have been so brought up as to render it not strange that they should have no religion: it is our duty, for the Gospel's sake, for our own sake, above all for the sake of those without, that we keep apart from vice and self-indulgence, that we be active in all things pure and good, and that we labour for other men's spiritual welfare.

III. Let us now consider, in the third and last

place, the extreme diligence in good which should mark our walk.

The Apostle says, after he has exhorted us to walk in wisdom, "Redeeming the time." Now, the words, "Redeeming the time," are not to be used in the sense in which some use them, in the sense, that is, of making up for the past by doing more in the present. The true Christian of course is all the more active because he knows that he has lost so much time. But the true meaning of the words is rather that of rescuing the time from misuse and waste, snatching it from the evil that would soon swallow it up, keeping it from evil to devote it to good. To redeem the time is to grasp every opportunity that occurs for any good work, to be free from all procrastination and all carelessness. In another place St. Paul says, "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil," and saying so he teaches that every moment that is not seized and employed for good is wasted and lost. There is so much evil in the world, temptations are so very rife, Satan is so busy, that time has, so to speak, to be struggled for before it can be given to good. It behoves us then, as men knowing that every moment of time is precious, as men knowing that often opportunities come but once, as men knowing that what of our time is not in some way or other given to God is in reality given to Satan; it behoves us, I say, to be as active as we can in every good work and way. It behoves us in all our intercourse with men, in all our business dealings with them, in all our friendly

meetings with them, to let the light of our religious life shine before them, not ostentatiously, but humbly, that so we may extol the grace of God before them. O! there should be no listlessness, no half-heartedness, no merely spasmodic efforts with us. We ought to be intensely, deeply, constantly in earnest. Like mariners carefully watching every breath of wind that can help them, and trimming their sails to catch every breeze that can aid in bringing them to port, should we be in our watchfulness to seize every opportunity for doing good, directly or indirectly, to our fellow-men and for growing in goodness ourselves. And not only in our behaviour towards them that are without, but also in our behaviour towards them that are within, and in our behaviour in secret, ought we to be most diligent in all things good. Redeeming the time, rescuing it from evil, from Satan, should be our constant work.

In conclusion, brethren, as we would see our Master's cause advanced, as we would see souls saved from eternal death, as we would contribute in some degree to the glory of God and the highest good of man, let us see that religion is with us no poor empty form. Let us see that the life is within us, which being within cannot but manifest itself without. Let us see that Christ is ours and we His, and that by living like Him, and labouring like Him, we strive to commend His Gospel to them that are without.

XXVIII.

“Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”—Colossians iv., 6.

“THAT ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.” Is then the average Christian man or woman expected to be an expert reasoner, capable of dealing off-hand, as it were, with all the arguments which may be advanced by unbelievers and all the difficulties of anxious souls? Surely so much as this cannot be expected. It is not every one that can think logically or express himself correctly and clearly, and in mere reasoning power many an unbeliever may be much more than a match for the Christian whose faith he assails. No, St. Paul’s words have not to be taken as meaning that the Christian must be able to meet all difficulties and to solve all doubts, but must be regarded as implying that his faith must be intelligently held and that he must be able to bear testimony as to what Christ has done for himself. One may be no great master of dialectics and yet may be able to tell what the living Christ has done for himself, and when he can do this he surely has his answer for every man. And, beyond this, one may be no powerful reasoner and yet may speak at all times so purely and so wisely that it will be manifest that some high influence is moulding his inner life, and thus indirectly witness will be borne to the justice of the claims of Christianity to be from above. We can convince men by living out Christianity before

them, though we may not be able to overcome them in argument, and it is no small matter in connection with Christian living that one's speech should always be with grace.

What our text then appears to teach us is this, that we are to witness for the truth by means of our speech both indirectly and directly, indirectly by letting it always be with grace, directly by having it so seasoned with salt that we may know how we ought to answer every man.

I. We must witness for the truth indirectly by letting our speech be alway with grace.

In the verse coming before our text we find the Apostle counselling us to walk in wisdom toward them that are without, and we must, I think, understand his counsel to us in the text as linked with that of the foregoing verse. In other words we must take it that walking in wisdom towards them that are without concerns our speech as well as our actions. We are not to forget that even when we are not talking on religious subjects our speech may influence for good or evil those who are around us, and that it will be specially noted by those who are not themselves even professedly Christian. The letter from which our text is taken was written to men dwelling in a heathen city, and St. Paul was anxious that these men should ever be mindful of their surroundings. He would have them speak at all times so that their heathen neighbours would perceive that some great spiritual change had taken place in them. And although we dwell in a professedly Christian

land, there are very many around us who are indifferent to religion and not a few who are antagonistic to it, and it is meet therefore that we should speak wisely as well as act wisely for the sake of such persons, our desire being that no unguarded words of ours should make them think of religion as but a form and nothing more. Very much for the sake of those that are without, our speech should be alway with grace.

But, indeed, whether with regard to those without or with regard only to that which is right in itself, our speech should alway be with grace. We must not indeed be unmindful of the connection in which our text stands, we must not forget that the Apostle desires us always to have regard to the moral influence which our words may have upon others, but at the same time we must remember that, as it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh, the natural speech of every Christian man is pure, kindly and gracious speech. Even if it were less the case than it is, that the general conversation of professedly Christian people influenced others in their judgments about the value of Christianity, it would still behove us as Christian people to see that our words were ever words of grace.

“Let your speech be alway with grace.” We should mark that word alway. There are times when it is not difficult for any man to speak in a becoming way. When one is plunged in deep grief or prostrate by severe sickness, it is not a matter of wonder that he should be found speaking more wisely and

reverently than he is at other times perhaps accustomed to do. When a man, hasty in temper and not at all given to put restraint on himself in the matter of his words, finds all things going well with him and those around him particularly kind and agreeable, it is not surprising that his utterances should be less venomous than usual. When one is placed where he knows that any foolish words of his might tell against his worldly prospects, it is a very natural thing for him to put a restraint upon his lips. And when one is in the society of people of exceptional elevation of character, of people whose true goodness is conspicuous even to the most careless observer, be the man ever so rough and careless in his speech in a general way, he will not be at all unlikely to bring his words under control while he is with them. But in our text St. Paul is not speaking of how we should do in exceptional circumstances ; he is giving us a counsel as to how we should at all times order our speech. "Alway with grace." In our business hours and in our hours of recreation, in our homes and in society, whether circumstances are for us or against us, whether those whom we meet are friendly or unfriendly, the same rule holds. Our speech should have always the same high tone, should never be coarse, harsh, bitter, inconsiderate, vapid ; but always wise, gentle, pure. Alway with grace. A counsel of perfection, you say, an utterly unattainable ideal ! Who is there whose speech is alway with grace, who is there in this world, where disappointments are so many and so much to try the temper is always

occurring, that can regulate his speech on all occasions? My friends, I freely grant that the ordering of one's speech is no easy matter. I cannot but confess that even many people, who are otherwise, humanly speaking, above reproach, are not free from defects and faults of speech. But while this is true, it is no less true that we should all keep before us a very lofty ideal, and that a much nearer approach than we are accustomed to think possible to what St. Paul sets forth as the ideal of speech is attainable by us all. And therefore we are not to set aside as impracticable the counsel, "Let your speech be alway with grace," but are to make the following of that counsel our prayerful aim.

"With grace." It is needless to remark that, when St. Paul speaks here of grace, he is not speaking of any mere beauty or refinement of utterance such as may be natural to some men and carefully acquired by others. Of course, no one of us can fail to admire beautiful and cultured speech, but one may have much that is refined and graceful in his utterances and yet may lack that grace of which the Apostle speaks. When the Apostle says, "Let your speech be alway with grace," he means that all our utterances should be kindly, pure and sincere. All our talk cannot be of sacred things, much of it must be of our ordinary work and the interests of common life. But our conversation, although it may be in a large measure only about worldly things, should never be rough or coarse or unkind. There are too many whose ordinary talk is

vain and silly, if it is not coarse and impure: too many whose talk is terribly inconsiderate, who scarce can open their lips without lacerating some one's feelings: too many whose words are often harsh and bitter and passionate. Now, in all our utterances we should have a regard for the feelings of those around us, should be manifestly sincere, should be chaste and clean, even though we may be bright and mirthful. I do not mean that our speech should be, in the strict sense of the word, studied speech, that it should not flow forth freely and naturally. I do not mean that at any time we should speak merely for the sake of effect. We should speak as we feel, speak spontaneously and heartily. Yet, while our speech is to be natural, it is at the same time to be guarded: while it is to be the free expression of our thoughts and feelings, our constant care must be that these thoughts and feelings are themselves right. If our speech is of sacred things, it must be unaffectedly reverent and wholly sincere: if it is of common things, it must yet have about it a manifest elevation of tone. In the long run every man's speech indicates of what disposition the man himself is. And, if we have the divine grace abiding in our hearts, our speech will be itself with grace. If the stream is to be crystal pure, there must be no defilement in the ground from which its head waters gush forth. And if our speech is to be alway with grace there must be grace within us to give character to our words. Of course, even the man who has not grace in his heart may at times utter words that

formally at least are wise and good, and the man that has grace may speak as he ought not to speak. But the one thing that will enable a man to speak habitually in a meet and fitting way is that he have a renewed heart. Even with a renewed heart one must keep watch over his words, else St. Paul would not have said, "Let your speech be alway with grace." But, after all, the great thing is to have renewed hearts, hearts filled with pure and generous thoughts, for out of such hearts pure and kindly utterances must come. And these utterances, not only negatively gracious—gracious, that is, in the sense of being free from all coarseness and malice, but also positively gracious, full, that is, of kindness and considerateness and manifest sympathy with all things pure and good, while they are the becoming utterances of Christian people, will not fail to influence some at least of those whose attitude to Christianity is critical rather than favourable to regard it in a kindlier spirit. Were all men professedly favourable to our Christian religion, it would be no less imperative on us than it is now that our speech should be alway with grace. But all men are not even professedly favourable to Christianity, and any lack of grace in the speech of professing Christians is only likely to make those without regard religion as but an empty profession. As those then who would fain attain for themselves all that is ideally best in conduct, and who also are very desirous to do all they can to influence those around them for good, it behoves us all to obey the

apostolic injunction and let our speech be alway with grace.

II. We now note, in the second place, that we should witness for the truth directly by having our speech so seasoned with salt that we may know how we ought to answer every man.

When the Apostle speaks of our having our speech seasoned with salt, he has been supposed by some to mean that we should have our conversation preserved from all impurity. We know that a common use of salt is to save from corruption things that have a tendency to become corrupted, and as men's speech tends too often to become impure it has been thought that St. Paul in our text tells us to take measures to keep untainted all our utterances. But, surely, when he says to us, "Let your speech be alway with grace," he manifestly teaches us that our speech should be pure, and when he links our knowing how to answer every man with our having our speech seasoned with salt he must by doing so show us that we need practical wisdom to guide us in our answers to those who are antagonistic to Christianity or are beset by spiritual difficulties. I take it that the salt of our text is Christian good sense, spiritual discrimination or insight, some capacity for knowing men and for grasping clearly what is the matter calling for consideration. I think that speech seasoned with salt is strong, clear, pointed speech, speech with understanding behind it, speech in which something is really said, and that something pertinent and to the purpose. I do not suppose that the

Apostle is referring to a certain natural shrewdness which some people undoubtedly possess, rather is he speaking of a gift of discernment imparted by the Spirit of God: yet that of which he speaks is analogous to the natural shrewdness which, wherever it is found, gives a seasoning as with salt to human utterances. There are many people who talk terribly at random, whose speech, if copious enough, is always singularly insipid, who never seem to apprehend very clearly what it is about which people are talking to them or about which they themselves are talking to other people. Their answers are no answers, but a mere confused jumble of words. Now, in contrast to their feeble and inept outpourings of words, how refreshing is the talk, witty perhaps, but assuredly clear, strong and sensible, of people who have sound ideas and definite knowledge of what should be said! A great writer of last century, weary, I suppose, with the babblements to which he was at times compelled to listen, proclaimed that "speech is silver, but silence is golden." There is of course something of exaggeration in Carlyle's utterance. Silence is golden when one knows well that he has nothing worth listening to or to say. But speech may be golden too. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." It is always well to say too little rather than too much, but when speech is of worthy things, and is itself clear and pointed, it is ever good to listen to.

Now, the speech of the Christian man, and above all his speech when spiritual things are under

consideration, should be in a spiritual way such as the speech of the shrewd, clear-headed man is in a natural way. One must confess that sometimes there is a sad insipidity in what passes as pious talk. Stock phrases are uttered, scripture is inappropriately quoted, vague and feeble sentiment does duty for what should be the utterance of deep spiritual experience, and they who listen for some word of light and leading listen in vain. Now, my brethren, our speech should never be aimless and pointless, but fervid, intelligent, direct, suitable to those whom we address and to the subject.

Above all, when men question us about religion, when they confront us with objections to Christianity or ask us to solve for them, if we can, the doubts and difficulties which distress them, we should be ready with reasonable answers. "That ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." I said at the beginning of this discourse that every Christian man or woman could not be expected to be an expert reasoner, able to confute all the arguments of unbelievers and to solve all the doubts of anxious souls. It is not every one who is competent to answer easily all the objections, critical, historical and philosophical, which may be advanced against Christianity, nor every one who can readily deal with all the doubts and difficulties of honest but perplexed seekers after truth. Yet, surely every Christian knows what led himself to Christ and what Christ has done for him, and it is always possible for him to tell of the life and peace which coming to

Christ has brought him. And there is no Christian man who is ignorant of, and who is unable to tell, what Christianity has done for the world, what light it has brought to those sitting in darkness, what hope it has kindled in despairing souls, what elevation it has given to character, what life it has imparted to all efforts for the social amelioration of mankind. Be it then that one has no high education, no wide acquaintance with literature, no philosophic culture, if he is a man whose own heart the grace of God has renewed, he can still give his answer to every man. He can tell how the divine grace found him in his dire necessity and has sustained him and upheld him: he can tell how the Gospel has brought to him a peace, a joy and a hope to which before he was a stranger; he can point to the many whose experience is akin to his own, and he can safely challenge the gainsayer to point to him any system of philosophy or any religion which has done for men what Christianity has done. Christianity has indeed nothing to fear from all the laboured arguments that its assailants direct against it; but even he who has not knowledge enough or skill enough to deal with all objections can, if he himself has had his heart renewed, bear witness to what Christianity has meant for him. And he who is thus himself acquainted with the power of Christ to save can always have, as well as a reply to objectors, some meet answer for one depressed by anxieties and doubts. Let us but know by experience the power of the living Christ to renew and strengthen,

and we shall not fail to have an answer for every man who asks us why we believe. The salt which is to season our speeeh is largely the salt of Christian experience.

Let me close, dear brethren, by asking you to follow faithfully the apostolic counsel. Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt. Speak as Christians should speak—purely, wisely, lovingly, truthfully, and above all, when men would know from you the reason of the hope that is in you, be not afraid to tell them that it is that Christ has brought new life to your souls.

XXIX.

"All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord: whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts; with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here."—Colossians iv., 7-9.

IT is generally agreed, as I have before stated, that St. Paul was not the personal founder of the Church at Colossae—indeed, that he had not even visited the city. Yet he must have had many personal friends among the Colossian Christians, and must have known that these Christians in general had a most kindly feeling towards him, else he could not have written to them in the way in which he writes in our text. Had there not been a close bond of fellowship between him and the Church in Colossae, he could never have written, "All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you." One does not write in such terms except to those whom he knows to be interested in him. And, although St. Paul had beyond almost all men the enthusiasm of humanity, and could interest himself deeply in those that were strangers to him, as we can see from the way in which he writes in his Epistle to the Romans, among whom his personal friends numbered perhaps only thirty or forty, there is still the note of very special interest in the Colossian Christians in the words which form our text. Plainly the Apostle, even if he had never visited Colossae, felt towards the believers there as

if they were his own spiritual children, and they regarded him as indirectly at least their father in the faith. We have, then, in our text just a kindly message to those who loved and were interested in him from the large-hearted St. Paul. The words of the Apostle in the verses which we are now considering were not written either to teach some truth which was to be believed or to call to the performance of some duty which was fitting to be done. They were written just as an utterance of friendliness. Yet, although not designed either to teach doctrine or to inculcate duty, the words of our text do, as a matter of fact, teach us lessons of great practical importance. They teach us something, surely, about the loving and friendly spirit which should exist between those who minister and those who are ministered to: they teach us something about the interest which Christian communities should take in each other and, indeed, each Christian in all Christians: and in so far as they relate to the persons by whom St. Paul's letter to the Colossian Christians was sent they teach us something about the power of the Gospel to transform and ennable men's lives. St. Paul did not put into his letter to Colossae all that he wished should be said to the friends there, but he sent the letter by messengers to whom he gave verbal instructions. We shall best apprehend, I think, the implicit teaching of our text by turning our thoughts, first, to St. Paul's messengers and, secondly, to the objects for which they were sent.

I. We consider, in the first place, St. Paul's messengers to Colossae.

They were two, Tychicus and Onesimus. About neither of these two men do we know very much, and yet the little that we do know about them is very interesting. Both of them, I fancy, were Gentiles, and converts from heathenism. In the early Christian Church there were of course many Jews, and seemingly also not a few Gentiles who had been Jewish proselytes before they became Christians. But in comparatively few years after St. Paul's missionary labours began, outside of Palestine at any rate, the Gentiles in the Churches must have much exceeded in numbers both Jews and proselytes. And we have no reason to think that either Tychicus or Onesimus was other than a Gentile convert from heathenism. Both bear Greek names, although that does not determine much, because many Jews did the same, but there is no mention of any Jewish connection in the case of either.

Tychicus was an Asiatic, probably a native of Ephesus. At any rate Trophimus, who is mentioned in the book of the Acts of the Apostles along with him, was an Ephesian, and in all likelihood the two were natives of Ephesus and had been converted by St. Paul during his sojourn there. Tychicus may have been a freedman, for his name was a common one among freedmen and slaves. He is first mentioned in the 20th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, where he appears as one of the seven who had been with St. Paul in Greece during his third great

missionary journey, and who accompanied him into Asia on his fateful way to Jerusalem. "There accompanied him into Asia, Sopater of Berea, and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus." Of these seven Aristarchus and Trophimus certainly went on with St. Paul to Jerusalem and Tychicus may have done so also. Whether he did so or not, however, he was assuredly much with St. Paul during his imprisonment, for we find him mentioned in four of the Epistles which the great Apostle wrote while a prisoner. It is generally held that St. Paul was liberated from prison in Rome, liberated I should rather say from confinement, for although under military supervision he was not actually in prison, at the end of those two years of which St. Luke speaks at the close of the Book of Acts, and that after a season of liberty and fresh missionary labour he was again carried to Rome as a prisoner and suffered martyrdom there. And it is commonly held that it was in this second and severer imprisonment that he wrote his two Epistles to Timothy and his Epistle to Titus. But whether this was so or not, the second Epistle to Timothy was assuredly the last letter which he wrote, for in it he spoke of his impending death, and in that second Epistle Tychicus is mentioned as having just been sent to Ephesus. Plainly then he was much with St. Paul till almost the close of the Apostle's life. And assuredly he was much beloved of the Apostle, and

was a man to be trusted. He was perhaps a deacon, for the word which in our text is translated minister may also be translated deacon. But, although we cannot be sure of this, we are sure that he was a man of much earnestness and fidelity. St. Paul calls him a beloved brother and a faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord. Once, in all likelihood, a heathen, he had become a willing worker in the Lord's vineyard and a wise counsellor, we may be sure, to the different Churches to which St. Paul sent him as his messenger. Assuredly he had such qualities as made him very dear to the aged Apostle, and commended him for the important work often given him to do.

Of Onesimus we read only in this Epistle and in the Epistle to Philemon, for almost certainly it is the same person who is spoken of in both the Epistles. From our text we learn that Onesimus was a Colossian, and from the Epistle to Philemon we learn that he had been a slave in the house of that friend of St. Paul's. I have said to you before that I am very sure that St. Paul was no lover of slavery, and that he laid down principles which in the end would lead to its abolition. But he did not bid slaves set themselves against their masters: he counselled no revolutionary proceedings: he was content to wait till the leaven of the Gospel, permeating the social mass, should change everywhere men's feelings towards slavery. Accordingly, when Onesimus, the slave of Philemon, who, after perhaps in some way wronging his master, had by some means managed

to reach Rome, became a Christian under the teaching of St. Paul, the Apostle, who fain would have kept the young man by him, sent him back to his master. It is quite possible to doubt if this was needful, but it is not possible to doubt that St. Paul was eager that Philemon, himself a Christian, should treat the returned servant with all possible Christian kindness. Indeed, nothing can be more beautiful than the sweet courtesy with which St. Paul addresses his friend and commends Onesimus to his thoughtful care. “I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now is profitable to thee and to me: whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him that is mine own bowels; whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the Gospel: but without thy mind would I do nothing that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly. For perhaps he therefore departed for a season that thou shouldest receive him for ever: not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord.” One cannot read these words without perceiving at once the tender care for Onesimus which St. Paul cherished, and the marvellous change which the Gospel had wrought on this once thoughtless and unprofitable servant. True, the love of a pastor for one whom he has been the means of bringing to the Saviour is surely only

most natural, and the change which genuine conversion effects is assuredly a radical one, for “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” Yet it is striking to note that, amid the many whom St. Paul brought to the knowledge of the truth, no one seems to have been dearer to him, and no one more marked by the best Christian qualities, than this once unpromising Onesimus, and that few were likelier to have found their way to the hired house of the Apostle in Rome, where he laboured as an ambassador in bonds, than this runaway slave.

St. Paul’s messengers to Colossae then were not, from a worldly point of view, distinguished persons, but they were earnest Christian men, dear to the Apostle’s heart, and doubtless eminently fitted for the work which the Apostle commissioned them to do.

II. We now consider, in the second place, on what errand St. Paul’s messengers were sent to Colossae.

They were sent to tell the Christians of Colossae about St. Paul’s state and his work, to learn the condition of the Colossian Church, and to offer to that Church such comfort as under possible circumstances of trial it might greatly need.

Tychicus and Onesimus had to tell the Colossian Christians all that they were anxious to know about the aged Apostle from whom indirectly, if not directly, they had received the Gospel. It was very natural that they should be anxious to know about him, for he was the Apostle of the Gentiles, he was

a prisoner, he was aged and worn, he was in grave danger. The Church has never had an earthly head, even if there have been those who have laid claim to headship in it, but it has had its great pastors, and it has never had a greater than St. Paul. His services to Christianity can never be over-estimated. It is quite true that God is not dependent for the execution of His purposes on any particular individual. Had Saul of Tarsus not become the Apostle of the Gentiles, doubtless an Apostle of the Gentiles would have been found. But it was Saul of Tarsus who did become the Apostle of the Gentiles, and what he did as such can never be valued too highly. The care of all the Churches was on him, and right worthily did he care for all. I cannot wonder then that, when he was a prisoner in Rome, the Churches were eager for tidings about him. No one of these Churches in which he had laboured could hear often regarding him. No doubt there was much coming and going between Europe and Western Asia while he was a prisoner in Rome, but only a few of those who travelled would be able to communicate to the Churches any tidings regarding the condition and prospects of one who was so dear to all. Doubtless then, when Tychicus and Onesimus reached Colossae, there would be many eager inquiries as to how St. Paul was bearing his imprisonment, as to what prospects there were of his being released, and as to the work which he was permitted to do. Tychicus would be ready, and doubtless Onesimus also, to answer all these eager inquiries. "All my state

shall Tychicus declare unto you." "They shall make known unto you all things which are done here." St. Paul's messengers would be able to tell the Colossian Christians all that they were eager to know about the Apostle himself, and also all that they were eager to know about the progress of the Gospel in Rome. Doubtless the progress of the Gospel in Rome and the attitude of the imperial authorities towards it would interest Christians, and especially Gentile Christians, very deeply. For Rome was then the imperial city, the great heart of the mighty empire, and triumphs of the Gospel there would mean much for its progress everywhere, while persecutions begun there would spread to the Empire's utmost bounds. There is nothing that affects the heart that does not affect every portion of the organism. Natural then was it for Christians throughout the Roman Empire to be eager to know all things which were being done in Rome. And such things St. Paul's messengers were to make known to the Colossian Christians.

But St. Paul's friends were not simply bearers of tidings. They were sent to learn the condition of the Colossian Church, and to offer comfort in so far as comfort was needed. "Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts." Tychicus at least the Apostle expected soon to return to him, and I have little doubt that he desired and expected that Philemon would give Onesimus his freedom and send him back to minister to him who had been the

spiritual father of both. Whether, what I have little doubt was the Apostle's eager desire was gratified, we have no means of knowing, but doubtless he would be eager to know from one at least of his messengers if the Christians at Colossae were standing fast in the faith and if there were being added to the Church daily such as should be saved. And he desired that Tychicus with his large heart and devotion to his work and practical acquaintance with men's varied needs, and Onesimus with his young enthusiasm and eagerness for Christian service, should be able to offer to the brethren at Colossae all needed consolation. There is never a time at which some of the members of a Christian Church do not need consolation, and sometimes there is such a season of trial for a whole Christian community that all its members need to be consoled. Whether there was any general affliction pressing the Colossian Church when St. Paul wrote to it by Tychicus and Onesimus we cannot tell: but, if there was, it was St. Paul's fervent desire that these brethren should do their best to comfort the tried hearts. And in one respect, indeed, they could comfort the Christians at Colossae. These Christians were anxious about St. Paul in his imprisonment, and Tychicus and his companion could bear to them somewhat cheering tidings. For St. Paul was as yet uncondemned and although a prisoner he was yet allowed to preach the Gospel to all that came to him.

My brethren, there are one or two lessons of practical importance to be learned from the words

on which we have been meditating, and to these I would turn your attention before I close.

The first of these lessons is that there should be the most loving and friendly relations between those who minister and those who are ministered to. Between such the tie is akin to that between parents and children, and the love that naturally shows itself between parents and children should show itself between them. Often it does so, but it should always do so. When such love does not exist, how little of true good can be accomplished ! The Church should be as the happiest of happy homes, where reproofs are rarely needed, where loving words are common, and where mutual kindliness and confidence inspire all hearts.

The next lesson which we should learn is that Christian communities should take an interest in each other, all Christians in Christian Missions, and each Christian in his brethren. There is on the part of many professing Christians too much of the spirit of aloofness. Rome is not concerned about Colossae or Colossae about Rome. St. Paul's condition and work in distant Rome concerns those in other Churches little. Nay, sometimes those in the same Church are little concerned about each other. Now, this is not as it ought to be. The whole Church is but one body, and all Christians are members one of another. It behoves us then to take a loving interest in all the Churches and indeed in all that bear the Christian name. Above all it behoves us to take a lively interest in missions and

missionaries. When the soldiers of a country are fighting its battles far away, who is there that is not interested in their doings and sufferings? And who should not be interested in those brave and true soldiers of the cross who amid, it may be, gravest perils and trials, amid hardship and loneliness, are fighting the Lord's battle in heathen lands?

The last lesson of our text is regarding the power of the Gospel to transform and ennoble men's lives. Tychicus, presumably by birth and education a heathen, a worshipper, we may believe, of Diana of Ephesus, becomes a faithful minister of the Gospel, a wise counsellor, a true "son of consolation." Onesimus, a thoughtless runaway slave, becomes a Christian so full of grace that the great Apostle of the Gentiles loves him as a very son. There is no limit to what the grace of God can do, there is no occasion for us to despair utterly of any. The uplifted Christ can draw any man unto him. Alike for ourselves then and for others let us rely on that grace which bringeth salvation.

XXX.

"Aristarchus my fellow prisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you receive him;) and Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you."—Colossians iv., 10-14.

AT the close of the Acts of the Apostles we read, "And St. Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." During these two years the Apostle was certainly a prisoner, always under close military surveillance, but his imprisonment, during which he wrote his Epistle to the Colossians, we see was not a lonely imprisonment. There came a time, indeed, when St. Paul was lonely enough. In his second Epistle to Timothy he wrote, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me," and again, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me." In all likelihood, however, the first Epistle to Timothy and that to Titus were written during a brief interval of freedom and the second to Timothy

during a second imprisonment of the Apostle in Rome, the two years spoken of in the Acts being supposed to have been followed by his liberation for a season. But whatever may be the truth about this, and at whatever time the Apostle wrote, "Only Luke is with me," it is certain that during the time when, although a prisoner, he was allowed to dwell in his own hired house, he had not to bear the burden of loneliness and inactivity. He had companions with him; he was allowed to preach the Gospel. Of those who were his companions and fellow-workers at the time when he wrote his letter to the Christians in Colossae we read in our text. They join with him in sending loving greetings to the Colossian Church. Only one of them, so far as we know, had a close connection with that Church, but all are interested in it. The sense of solidarity among Christians was strong in those early days of the Church. No doubt then as now there were discordant notes, and many of the Jewish Christians were less cordial in their feelings towards Gentile converts than they ought to have been. But there were not then the sharp divisions that separate Christians to-day, and the feeling of brotherhood was more or less cherished throughout the Church. And, in token of the recognition of the universal brotherhood of Christians, we find these Christian workers joining with St. Paul in sending kindly greetings from Rome to Colossae.

In our meditations we shall turn our attention, in the first place, to St. Paul's friends and fellow-

workers and, in the second place, to their loving interest in the Church at Colossae.

I. St. Paul's friends and fellow-workers.

The Apostle mentions six of these, three of them Jewish, and three of them Gentile Christians. The three Jewish Christians are Aristarchus, Marcus and Jesus, called Justus.

“Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner saluteth you.” Of Aristarchus we really know comparatively little, although he was for years closely associated with St. Paul. It is from our text that we learn that he was of Jewish blood. By birth and upbringing he seems to have been a Thessalonian, at any rate he had lived so long in Thessalonica that he is called in the Acts of the Apostles a Macedonian of that city. Yet St. Paul himself, Hebrew of the Hebrews as he was, was known as “Saul of Tarsus.” We may believe that Aristarchus was converted under St. Paul’s preaching at Thessalonica, that he was one of those who, as we are told in the Acts of the Apostles, believed, and consorted with St. Paul and Silas. We cannot, of course, be sure of this. He may not have been in Thessalonica at the time of St. Paul’s visit, and may have been converted in some other place. But his close association with the Apostle for years makes it seem very probable that it was to him he owed his conversion. Perhaps Aristarchus came to St. Paul during the eighteen months which he spent at Corinth, and thenceforth was his close companion. In any case we know that the two were together at Ephesus; that on the occasion of

the great tumult in that city Aristarchus, as a known companion of St. Paul, was dragged of the crowd into the theatre; that when, some months after this, St. Paul, having visited Macedonia and Greece, was on his way to Asia, Aristarchus was one of his travelling companions and possibly, like Trophimus, accompanied him all the way to Jerusalem; and that when the Apostle, after his imprisonment of two years at Cæsarea, was sent to Rome to stand at Cæsar's judgment seat, Aristarchus sailed with him in the ship of Adramyttium. Our text shows us that the two were together in Rome, and in some way they seem to have been sharers in imprisonment. At any rate St. Paul, in one place, calls Aristarchus his fellow-prisoner. It is but little that we know about this friend of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, yet from what we do know we can see that he was a fine type of man, a true friend, a large-hearted missionary, a man of resolute spirit.

The second named of the Apostle's Jewish fellow-workers is Marcus—"Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas." It should rather be cousin to Barnabas, but that is a matter of small moment. This Marcus is perhaps the St. Mark who wrote one of the four gospels, indeed probably is so, but is certainly the John, whose surname was Mark, who is three times mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. A friend of the Apostle Peter, he was the companion of St. Paul and Barnabas on the Apostle's first great missionary journey, but had departed from them from Pamphylia, having in some way, it would appear, lost heart for

the moment in the work. It was but a little time that he yielded to depression or fear, for we find him soon again at Antioch willing to accompany his friends. Yet his temporary defection had made St. Paul doubtful of his steadfastness, and led to the separation of that Apostle from Barnabas who still believed that his kinsman's heart was in his work. I have always thought it sad that these great missionaries should have parted asunder one from the other, and I rejoice to find in our text the Apostle's mention of the relationship of Marcus to Barnabas as a commendation of the former. St. Paul evidently had not forgotten his old friend and fellow-labourer, who had perhaps passed away, and still retained the old affection for him. At any rate he saw that St. Mark was timid and wavering no longer, and counselled the Colossians, should he come to them, to receive him in spite of any doubt they might have about him. And in his last Epistle, the Second to Timothy, written shortly before his death, he bears high testimony to St. Mark's true worth. "Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry." It is plain that St. Mark was one to whom the years had brought increasing strength and deepening fervour, one who had grown in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The last named of the Apostle's fellow-workers of the circumcision is Jesus or Joshua. "Jesus, which is called Justus." Our text is probably the only place in which the name of this faithful worker

is mentioned, for the Justus who is spoken of in the 18th Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles seems to have been a proselyte of the gate and not a man of Jewish blood. Yet this can be said of Justus, as of Aristarchus and Marcus, that he was a man of broad sympathies and evangelic zeal. These three men, all of them of the circumcision, were in no way marked by the narrowness which was so common even among Christian Jews, but were of one mind with the great Apostle of the Gentiles with whom they were associated, and like him laboured assiduously for the conversion of the heathen. And in their heart-whole sympathy with St. Paul in his work, as well as in their kind attentions to himself, they were, as he says with a fine human pathos, a comfort to him. Surely we can learn from what he says regarding these three friends of his that it is good for us too to have wide human sympathies, eagerness for the good of our kind, and constant willingness to sustain by our kind offices those on whom heavy burdens are laid.

The remaining three friends of whom St. Paul writes, Epaphras, St. Luke and Demas, were Gentile Christians.

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you.” Epaphras has already been mentioned in this letter to the Christians of Colossae, and he is mentioned again in the Epistle to Philemon. He was, as our text shows us, a native of Colossae, and was the founder of the Church in that city, as well seemingly as of the Churches in the neighbouring

cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis. He was evidently much loved by the Apostle, who in the beginning of his Epistle calls him his dear fellow-servant, and he seems in some way to have shared his friend's imprisonment, for in the Epistle to Philemon St. Paul calls him his fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus. Why the title, "a servant of Christ" is given to him alone of St. Paul's friends and fellow-workers it is not possible to say. All the six were, of course, both as Christian men and Christian ministers, servants of Christ, and we can only conjecture that it was on account of something special in the work of Epaphras that St. Paul calls him in the beginning of the Epistle his own fellow-servant, and here a servant of Christ. But whatever was the cause on account of which Epaphras was specially called a servant of Christ, there can be no doubt that he was a man of very uncommon fervour and earnestness, a man of large affections and unwearying devotion, a man whose labours were abundant and whose very prayers, as the words "always labouring fervently for you in prayers," show, were agonizings. "For I bear him record that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis." The word "zeal" should rather be "toil," and this toil is specially that of men in battle. Epaphras was a man of strenuous spirit, and a meet companion and fellow-worker of the Apostle of the Gentiles.

The next companion mentioned by St. Paul is St. Luke, and very sweet is the mention of St. Luke's name.

“ Luke, the beloved physician,” or, as we should rather read the words, “ Luke, the physician, the beloved one.” It is a somewhat striking thing that the name of St. Luke is only twice mentioned in Scripture, here in our text and in a verse in St. Paul’s final Epistle, his second Epistle to Timothy. Yet it is to him that we owe the Gospel which bears his name and the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, and he was the dear friend and close companion of St. Paul! There are some who have sought to identify him with the Silas or Silvanus who was so much associated with the Apostle, and there is no absolute unreasonableness in the identification. The mere fact of a double name is in no way against it, for St. Paul himself had a double name, and in our text we have a Jesus who was called Justus. But I think that had Silas and St. Luke been one and the same person, the Apostle would have mentioned both the names in our text. It has been generally believed that St. Luke was a native of Antioch, although some have suggested that he was of Italian origin, and that he was one of those early brought into the Christian Church. He was not a circumcised proselyte, however, but a simple Gentile Christian. From the way in which in the Acts of the Apostles he uses the word “ we,” it has been concluded that he joined St. Paul at Troas, when the Apostle was about to proceed into Macedonia, and that some years after he was with him at Philippi, went with him to Troas, and thence with other companions accompanied him all the way to Jerusalem on his last fateful

journey thither. Thenceforth the two seem never to have been far apart, for evidently they were together when after his two years of imprisonment in Cæsarea St. Paul was carried to Rome, and when, at whatever time it came, the time of the Apostle's departure was at hand, St. Luke alone was with him. "Only Luke is with me" were the Apostle's own most touching words. One loves to think of the splendid fidelity of this most modest and reticent man, the physician who doubtless cared for his friend in his sicknesses, the fellow-labourer who never grew weary of his work, the friend whom no peril could turn away. They sometimes say that in the New Testament there is little commendation of personal friendship. In direct words, no, it may be granted, but assuredly not in fact. Those who say that personal friendship is not commended forget about "Luke, the beloved physician."

The third named of St. Paul's Gentile fellow-workers is Demas. "Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you." Of Demas, as of St. Paul's Jewish fellow-worker, Jesus, who was called Justus, we know hardly anything. He is mentioned only here and in the Epistle to Philemon and in the second Epistle to Timothy. Whence he came and when he joined St. Paul we cannot tell. It has been thought that because the Apostle simply mentions his name in the text, and does not characterise him in any way, he had already discerned in him some tokens of wavering. But I do not think that such is the case. Demas was doubtless much like those with whom he

was associated, friendly to his leader, active in Christian work. But ere long the testing time came and then Demas was found wanting. “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.” I do not suppose these words mean that the man was mercenary. He simply loved ease and safety and sought a place more void of danger than Rome. Perhaps he too repented—who can say? But it is sad to think that the last mention of one, who had been honoured by an Apostle as his friend and fellow-worker, was that he had forsaken that Apostle in the hour of his sorest need.

II. We now consider, in the second place, the loving interest of St. Paul’s friends and fellow-workers in the Church at Colossae.

I have said that of the six fellow-workers whom St. Paul mentions in our text, only one, so far as we know, had any close connection with Colossae. That one was Epaphras, the founder, in all likelihood, of the Church there. St. Paul himself seems, as I have so often had occasion to remark, never to have been at Colossae, and perhaps, save Epaphras, no one of his six friends had visited it. Yet of this we cannot be sure. The workers in the early Christian Church went, many of them, far afield, and perhaps some or all of those who sent their greetings through St. Paul to the Colossian Christians were personally known to them. But whether known to these in person or known only by name all those Christian workers were deeply interested in them. The greetings from Aristarchus and the rest are not mere

formalities. Generally speaking, we all care at least a little for those to whom we send our greetings, but it was not simply a little that St. Paul's fellow-workers cared for the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which were at Colossae. These companions of the Apostle of the Gentiles were, in the best sense of the word, cosmopolitan : they were true citizens of the world : they cared for all men. Like their great leader himself, they counted themselves debtors both to the Greeks and the barbarians, both to the wise and the unwise. They cared beyond all things for the progress of the kingdom of God in the world, they rejoiced in the triumphs of the Gospel at Colossae, and they sought to cheer and encourage by manifested sympathy their fellow-Christians there. A great lesson to us surely of the way in which the well-being and advancement of the whole Christian Church should interest us all. But while all St. Paul's fellow-workers had a loving interest in the Church at Colossae there was one to whom its well-being was specially precious. That one was Epaphras, whose native city Colossae was. His abode for the time was on the banks of the Tiber, but his heart was where the Lycus flowed on its way to the Maeander. His thoughts flew across the Apennines, across the Adriatic, across Greece and the island-bestrewn *Ægean* to his own Phrygian home, and at once a patriot and a Christian he strove in prayer for his brethren far away. Many of us have known something of separation from our dear ones and have lifted up our hearts in earnest supplication for those

far away. But never have we prayed more earnestly for those dearest to us than Epaphras prayed for those to whom he had been a faithful minister of Christ. His prayers for them were labourings, strivings—to give St. Paul's exact word, agonizings. Thus earnestly should each one of us strive for his brethren, and thus earnestly should every minister strive for the souls committed to his care. And what was it for which Epaphras strove in prayer for his people?—For their temporal good? Yes, doubtless, but above all for their spiritual good. “Always striving for you in his prayers that ye may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.” There was a danger that these Christians, mainly Gentiles and brought up in heathenism, might, surrounded as they were by idolaters, be drawn back to their old associations. And there was a danger that they might be made a spoil of by some one through his philosophy and vain deceit, led astray into unchristian error. Epaphras prayed that they might be preserved from both these dangers, that they might be perfect in life and fully assured in faith, that they might stand in all the will of God. And what richer blessing could he have besought for his people than that their faith should not fail, their lives not deteriorate? And should not our prayers for our brethren and ourselves be that we may stand, perfect and fully assured, not in some doctrines only, and not in some one virtue, but in all that God wills we should believe and do.

And now, brethren, it but remains that I should

urge you to be like St. Paul and the friends who were so closely associated with him, to be prayerful, to be earnest for the good of others, to be steadfast amid all difficulties. But, even as you admire them, think ever of him whose servants and followers they were, and let the mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

XXXI.

“Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the Church which is in his house. And when this Epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the Church of the Laodiceans: and that ye likewise read the Epistle from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it. The salutation by the hand of me, Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen.—Colossians iv., 15-18.

THE three cities of Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis, lying on the banks of the Phrygian stream, the Lycus, were all famous cities of the old world. To-day only wretched villages lying amid heaps of crumbling ruins mark their old sites. Earthquakes and destroying armies and the hand of time have changed into a region of desolation what once was a scene of busy life and manifold activity. But, although Colossae and its neighbouring cities have long since lost all their ancient glories and indeed have practically ceased to be, they live for us yet as places of holy interest, for they gave an early welcome to Christianity, they were the seats of Christian Churches even in the Apostolic days, and they contained among their inhabitants many who were dear to the heart of the great Apostle of the Gentiles. It has been thought, as I have had occasion to remark before, that St. Paul was not directly the founder of the Churches of Colossae and Laodicea, and indeed that he had never visited the valley of the Lycus. The matter will never, I suppose, be determined, although the probability is that it was

to Epaphras, and not to St. Paul directly, that the planting of Christianity in Colossae was due. But, at any rate, the Gospel had almost certainly come to Colossae from Ephesus, when St. Paul was labouring there, and was brought to the Phrygian city by those who had heard it from the Apostle's lips. And many of the Colossian Christians were personally known to the Apostle, and all of them plainly held him in affection and reverence. And how much their welfare interested him is made very plain to us by that Epistle on whose closing words we meditate. Although then Colossae may not have actually been one of the scenes of St. Paul's missionary labours, it still lives for us as a place which, during the weary years of his imprisonment, was often in his thoughts, for whose people his earnest prayers often ascended, and to whose Church he wrote a letter, tender and gracious in its personal allusions, well fitted to meet the Church's present needs, but above all things rich in teaching of the loftiest kind and of the most enduring interest. Colossae can never appear of small importance in Christian eyes, for the Church there received and treasured and gave as a heritage to the ages a letter, valuable indeed as revealing to us the great loving heart of the Apostle of the Gentiles, but unspeakably more valuable as witnessing to the glory and saving power of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

We have in our meditations from time to time striven to grasp the teaching both for faith and conduct of this great Epistle: let us now seek to see

what lessons we may learn from its closing words. These closing words are certainly not free from difficulties of a kind. We cannot say who Nymphas was or where he had his home. We cannot be absolutely certain about the letter from Laodicea. And we do not know whether it was in Laodicea or in Colossae that Archippus carried on his ministry. But these are small matters after all. The teaching which we may derive from our text is not affected by our knowledge of the things to which I have referred or our lack of it. The words of our text are in the form of greetings and counsels to particular Churches and individuals, but in essence they are words for all time. And it is in their significance for all time that we would now regard them.

I. The first thing that strikes us in connection with our text is that it suggests to us the meetness of the friendliest relations amongst professing Christians and between different Christian communities.

The Colossian Christians are instructed to salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the Church which is in his house, to send for reading in the Church at Laodicea the letter which they had themselves received from St. Paul, and to get from Laodicea a letter to be read in the Colossian Church. Surely the giving of such instructions leads us to think that a spirit of unity should pervade the Church, that Christians should hold each other in mutual affection and esteem, and that everywhere there should be readiness to take such measures as

would conduce to the spiritual well-being of the Church as a whole. I have said that we do not know who Nymphas was, or where his house was situated. From the fact that he is mentioned along with the brethren in Laodicea it has generally been held that he was a prominent man among the Laodicean Christians, a man in whose house the brethren were wont to assemble for religious worship. It has been conjectured, however, that although mentioned along with the Laodicean brethren he lived at some little distance from Laodicea, and that this accounts for there being a Church or Christian congregation in his house. I fancy myself that this conjecture is right, and that his home was in Hierapolis, which was some six Roman miles to the north of Laodicea. Of course this is only a hypothesis, but I think it a reasonable one. In an earlier verse of this part of the Epistle St. Paul says, regarding Epaphras, "For I bear him record that he hath a great zeal for you, and for them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis," yet although there is an injunction to the Colossian Christians to salute their brethren in Laodicea, there is none to salute their brethren in Hierapolis. Is it not natural to suppose, under these circumstances, that the Church in Hierapolis was but a small congregation assembling in the house of Nymphas; yet that the Apostle would not have it forgotten when loving greetings were passing from Church to Church? But, in any case, St. Paul's instruction to these Colossian Christians to send loving greetings to their brethren in neigh-

bouring cities is indicative of the fitness of Christians, remembering that they belong to one great household of faith and of their cherishing and showing much love towards each other. And his instruction that the letter sent first to Colossae, should be sent on to Laodicea, and the letter from Laodicea read in the Church at Colossae indicates surely how meet it is that Christian people and Christian Churches should be eager to do all they can to help each other in the Christian life. The great truths which the Apostle unfolded in his letter to the Colossians were truths which the Laodiceans should also know, and the exalted Christian life to which in the letter the former were called was surely also the life which the latter should be encouraged to lead. About the letter from Laodicea we can, as I have already remarked, say nothing with absolute certainty. It has been thought by some that it was a letter written to St. Paul by the Laodicean Church, and sent by him, along with his own letter, to the Colossians, because it bore in some way on the contents of that letter. This is, I think, a somewhat far fetched hypothesis, and I am rather inclined to believe that the "Epistle from Laodicea" was either a letter, now lost, written by St. Paul himself to the Laodicean Church, or more probably what we now know as the Epistle to the Ephesians, but which many believe to have been a circular letter sent to several Churches. After all, it is a somewhat barren controversy. What is of moment is that the Churches were to share with each other whatever words of counsel or instruction

or consolation might come to them, and thus strive to promote each other's spiritual good.

Well would it be to-day, my brethren, if there were found prevailing in the Church a true brotherly spirit, and if amid all our diversities we yet recognised our true unity. Alas! we do not at least appear to do so. We have not one great united Church, but a multitude of Churches, and, as if this were not enough, these different Churches are indifferent, if not antagonistic to each other. The fragments of a broken mirror are all capable of reflecting the sunlight, and I do not deny to any of our many sects the capacity of witnessing for truth and righteousness, of reflecting, as it were, the light from heaven. Yet a mirror is better unbroken, and it would have been well had the Church kept its unity. This was perhaps impossible, men being such as they are, but Christian charity and helpfulness, and efforts towards brotherhood are surely not impossible. And the kindly interest of a Christian in his fellow-Christians is not impossible, although as a matter of fact we find that often the members of the same congregation remain entire strangers to each other. Of course this is unavoidable where congregations are very large, but it occurs too often where they are not so. Let us all learn to interest ourselves more in each other, to regard members of other Churches as still our Christian brethren, and to seek the well-being of the whole Church of God. They surely read our text ill who are narrow in their sympathies and intolerant towards many of

their fellow-Christians, and for whom the Church is only that denomination which they call their own.

II. The second thing in our text which calls for our attention is the high view which the Apostle takes of the Christian ministry, and his eagerness that those in the ministry should be found faithful.

“And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord that thou fulfil it.”

In the Epistle to Philemon Archippus is called by St. Paul his fellow-soldier, and is linked in such a way with Philemon himself that it is generally believed that he was his son or brother, or at least near relative residing in his house. He probably belonged to Colossae and is thought by some to have been a minister of the Church in that city. But others think that his home was in Laodicea and there actually is a tradition that he ministered to the Church there. It is not possible to come to any definite conclusion on the matter, nor is it necessary. Archippus was a minister of the Church either in Colossae or Laodicea, and the important matter to note is that St. Paul declares him to have received his ministry in the Lord, and practically counsels him to take heed to the fulfilling of it.

“The ministry which thou has received in the Lord.” The Greek word which St. Paul uses for ministry is the word usually employed to designate the office of a deacon. Archippus, I fancy, however, must have been more than a deacon, indeed almost certainly was a leading minister, or the leading

minister in the Church in which he was. But it concerns us less to determine what special office Archippus held, than to note St. Paul's lofty conception of the office of the ministry. The Apostle does not magnify the man who holds the office of a minister, but he magnifies the office which the man holds. The minister at the best is but a man, subject to all a man's weaknesses, and exposed to all a man's temptations, and is not rendered holier or better than other men by the mere fact that he is a minister. He should, indeed, be a man of holiest life, and the knowledge that he holds so high and responsible an office should always exert a great influence on him. But it is the office itself that the Apostle characterises so highly. It is not an office of man's institution, something which men have judged to be convenient and accordingly instituted, but an office which our Lord Jesus Christ has appointed in His Church, and for the meet execution of which He has promised Divine aids. One's call to the ministry comes to him in some shape or other through the Church, but in the voice of the Church one should recognise the voice of the Master calling him to high and honourable work. A minister may indeed prove wholly unworthy of the office which he holds, yet is every true minister an ambassador of Christ, one who has received his ministry not from man, but from the Divine Master.

Now this office, so high and holy, is one whose duties are to be performed with much carefulness and prayer. It is not good, one has said, when a

man's office fills him, but it is good when a man fills his office. "Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry that thou fulfil it." If Archippus was, as many believe, the chief minister of the Church at Laodicea, the counsel may not have been unnecessary. We do not know at what exact date the Book of the Revelation was written, but we do know that when it was written the Church in Laodicea had sunk into a lukewarm condition. And it may be that Archippus, friend and fellow-soldier of St. Paul as he was, lacked some qualities needful for a successful ministry, and required some counsel such as that which St. Paul bade the Colossians convey to him. In any case we learn from St. Paul's words that a minister cannot be too heedful, and that his people should encourage and stimulate him to all faithfulness in the discharge of his duty. Blessed surely for a minister himself, and specially blessed for those among whom he labours, is a faithful and earnest ministry, a ministry received in the Lord and heedfully fulfilled!

III. The last thing that calls for our attention in the text is the brief salutation with which it closes.

"The salutation by the hand of me, Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen."

The Apostle did not usually write his letters with his own hand, but employed some companion to write them for him. He may have had defective eyesight or some other physical infirmity which made writing difficult for him. But he always wrote the final words himself to attest the genuine-

ness of the letter, and to show his kindly interest in those to whom he wrote. He does not indeed say in every Epistle that the final salutation has been written by himself, but he tells us in the second Epistle to the Thessalonians that the salutation with his own hand is the token in every Epistle. And in the Epistle to the Colossians, as we see, he writes, "The salutation by the hand of me, Paul." And we may very justly say that as the salutation came from the hand of St. Paul, so all kindly wishes came from his heart. The Apostle indeed does not multiply utterances of affection, he uses but one word, the word "salutation," and one brief phrase, "Grace be with you," yet was his greeting no formal one, but one most sincere and hearty. The words with which we greet each other at meeting or parting are all of them words of kindly import, even if they are often but lightly used. And so the words, "salute" and "salutation," are words of kindly meaning, however spoken or written, but St. Paul used them to express the best feelings of a kindly heart.

Even, however, as the Apostle wrote the words, "The salutation by the hand of me, Paul," the chain wherewith he was bound galled his wrist, or at least by its pressure reminded him that it was there. And thus, himself reminded that he was a chained prisoner, he reminded the Colossians that he was so. He says, "Remember my bonds." Now, he did not write these words in a complaining spirit, did not write them either merely to move the

pity of the Colossians for himself. He wrote them to give weight, as it were, to his counsels, and to lead those to whom he wrote to sustain him by their prayers. If they remembered his bonds they could not doubt the sincerity with which he wrote to them, or think it strange that he should counsel them. A man that has suffered for conscience sake may surely be accepted as sincere, and may be counted as having a right to plead for the cause for which he has dared to suffer. But more: if they remembered his bonds it was natural that they should pray for him. He did not need and he did not want vapid sympathy, but he did need and he did want the prayers of the faithful. He needed to be sustained in the midst of trial, and the thought that prayer was constantly being offered for him was a cheering and sustaining thought.

After this touching allusion to his condition St. Paul closes his weighty and powerful letter with the words, "Grace be with you." There could not well be a shorter benediction, and yet in uttering it St. Paul was asking for the Colossians every needed blessing. When the mother is sending out her boy into the world words fail her, and she can only utter a fervent, "God bless you," but how much meaning she really puts into these words! And even so when St. Paul wrote, "Grace be with you," he in truth commanded the Colossians to the saving and sustaining favour of God for time and for eternity. And we ourselves may pray that the grace which St. Paul besought for the Colossians may be given to us. Our

one constant spiritual need is grace, the favour of God, in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Having that continually we have all.

And now, brethren, we have after the lapse of years finished our meditations on the great Epistle to the Colossians. I trust that these meditations have not been unprofitable to us, that they have led us to regard with deeper love and adoration the living Saviour whom St. Paul so exalts in his Epistle and, that they have stirred us to set more heartily our affections on things above. And now it but remains for me to urge you to turn often to the Epistle, and as you meditate on its great revelations and mark its solemn calls to faithful Christian living, may the Holy Spirit guide you and touch your hearts. I would have you to cling to Christ, I would have you to live as risen with Christ, and with this desire I pray, "Grace be with you. Amen."

END.

